



THUNDERBIRDS!

PREHISTORIC MONSTERS
IN AMERICA'S SKIES

LUCKY NUMBERS LOTTERY DREAMS AND PREMONITIONS

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LUMINOUS OWLS IN SEARCH OF AN ORNITHOLOGICAL ODDITY

SAMURAI SPIRITS • BOGGART MEMORIES • MYSTERY MONKEY • DAY OF THE DEAD BARBIE

THE WORLD OF

STRANGE PHENOMENA

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EGYPTIAN GOTHIC

CURSED MUMMIES,
HAUNTED MUSEUMS,
AND ANCIENT MAGIC

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UFO ENCOUNTER
COVERED UP?

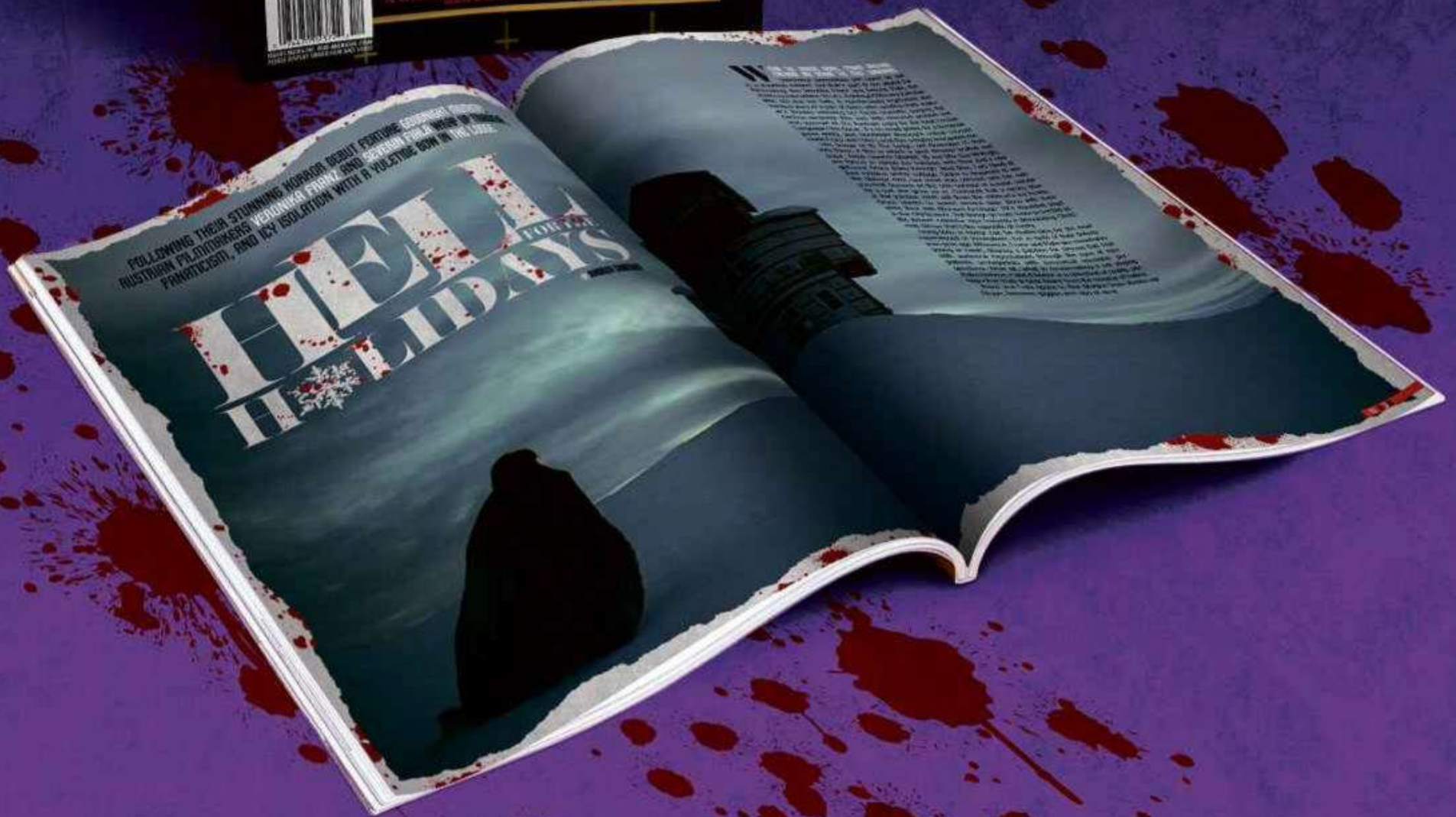
IT WAS 100 YEARS AGO TODAY...

THE CENTENARY OF
CHARLES FORT'S *BOOK
OF THE DAMNED*



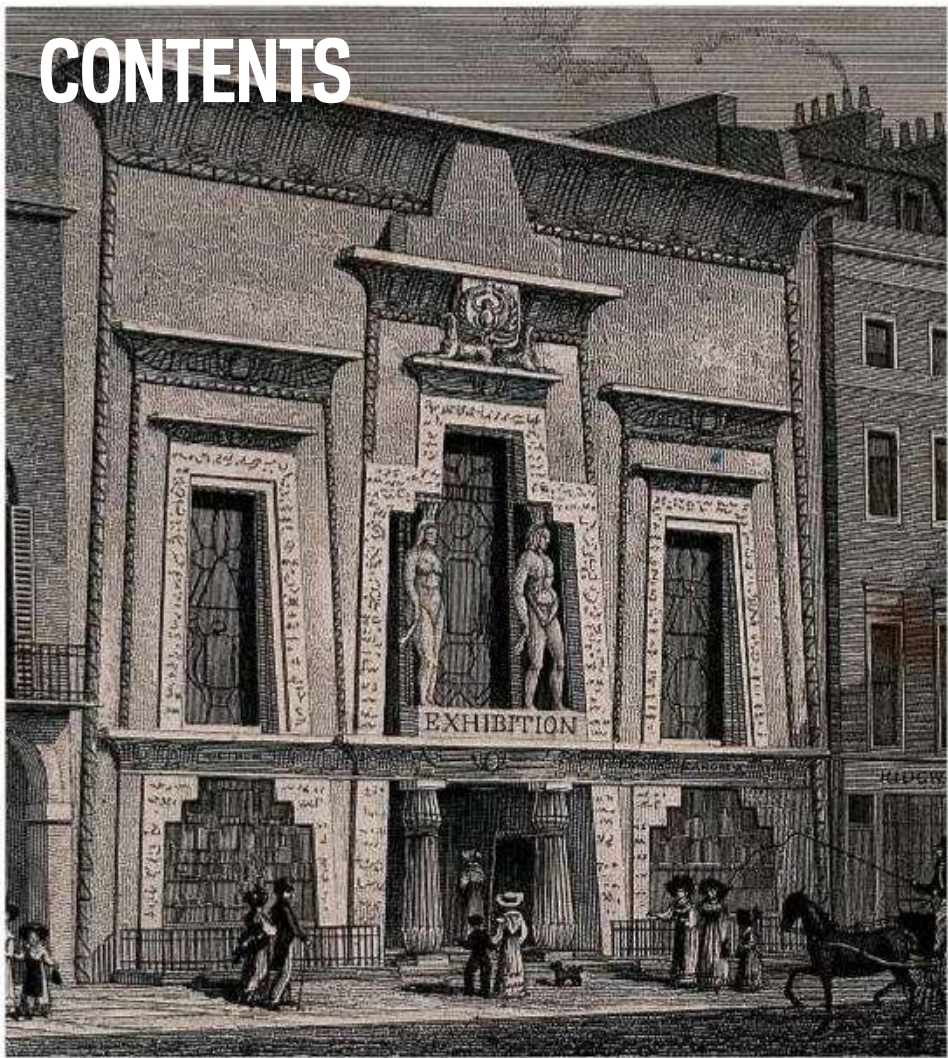
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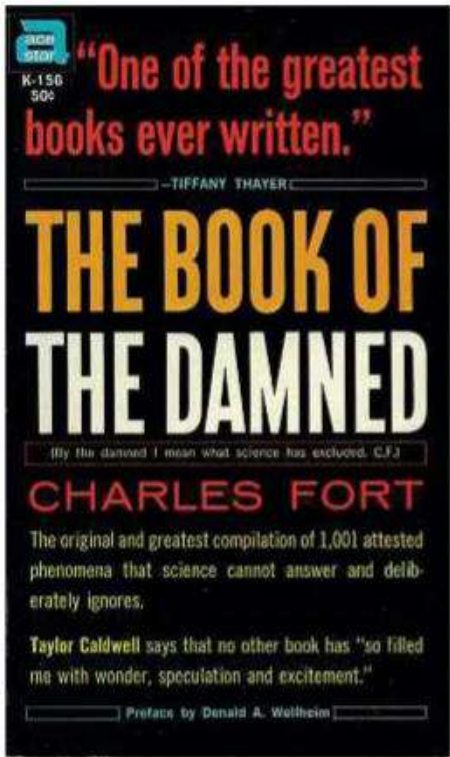


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ANDY BUCHANAN / AFP / GETTY IMAGES



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STRANGE DAYS

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44 THE LUCK OF THE DRAW

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EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

A PROCESSION OF THE DAMNED

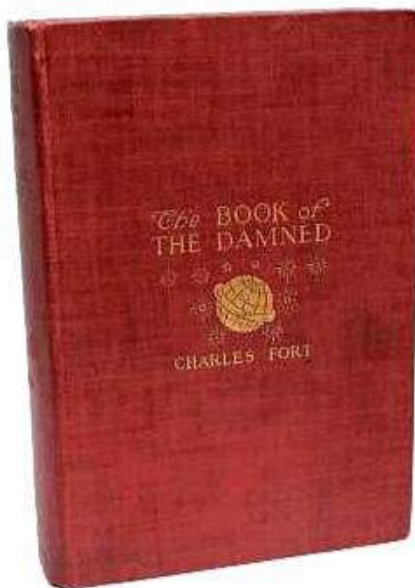
IT WAS 100 YEARS AGO TODAY...

This issue, we celebrate a very special centenary for forteans: ultimately, it's the inspiration for the magazine you hold in your hands and the reason we're all here some 45 years and nearly 400 issues after Bob Rickard published the first issue of *The News* (as *FT* was known back then) in 1973.

Charles Fort's *The Book of the Damned* landed on Earth 100 years ago, courtesy of New York publishers Boni and Liveright, on 1 December 1919, bound in red cloth, with gold lettering on the cover and retailing for \$1.90.

Strangely, it appears that copies only reached bookshops in January of 1920 – the copy Fort inscribed to his wife, Anna, is dated 7 January. We're using this odd hiatus as an excuse to spread our celebration of this momentous date in literary history over three months, taking us through Christmas and into the New Year. In this issue (p38), longtime fortean researcher and frequent contributor to these pages Ulrich Magin looks at the publication of Fort's opus and its critical reception in the newspapers and journals of the time; one surprising fact is that Edward Bernays, nephew of Sigmund Freud and "father of public relations", was responsible for promoting it. While some reviewers rejected the book ("a quagmire of pseudo-science" said the *New York Times*), others were delighted by the author's "onslaught upon the accumulated lunacy of 50 centuries" (Ben Hecht) and swiftly announced themselves to be 'Fortean'. Most of those who fell under Fort's spell were men and women of letters: for a while, *The Book of the Damned* was seen as an example of modern, avant-garde literature rather than as a handbook for UFO-spotters.

We'll be presenting some different perspectives on Fort's seminal work in our next two issues: at Christmas, Martin Shough and Wim van Utrecht reassess the Bishop's Torpedo, which Fort wrote up in *The Book of the Damned* and described as "perhaps the most remarkable" of the cases covered therein. And in January, Ian Kidd will examine Fort's breakthrough book in the context of the philosophy of the time.



AND IN OTHER NEWS...

As we went to press, Japan marked the formal ascension of the country's new Emperor to the Chrysanthemum Throne. Emperoro Naruhito hopes to usher in a new era of *Reiwa*, or 'beautiful harmony', but as SD Tucker notes in his Strange Statesmen report, there are some darker (and weirder) currents abroad in contemporary Japan. As there are elsewhere, of course: from a Dutch family locked in a basement for nine years by a mad Austrian carpenter (p4), to the Chinese Goverment's spinning of conspiracy theories out of the Hong Kong protests (p56). Meanwhile, Maria J Pérez Cuervo explores the rise of the Egyptian Gothic (p28), Jan Bondeson pays a visit to the Hamburg waxworks that has survived two world wars (p76), and Lisa Gledhill reminds us that it's time to stir up our Christmas puds (p55).

ERRATA?

FT381:36: Matt Salusbury's nit-picking antennæ were set twitching by a reference to one of the films discussed in Gail-Nina Anderson's feature on folk horror. "The film *The Blood on Satan's Claw* is described (on page 38) as being set in 'an 18th century village'. Looking at the stills from the film in the article – and more online – the costume, and particularly the armour, seems more 17th century, although I concede there are some anachronisms; one still shows a gent in what seems like an 18th-century wig, while different extras are clothed in the attire of both ends of the 17th century."

The Wikipedia page for the film describes it as set in the early 18th century; the IMDB has 17th century. We tried to dig out our copy of John Hamilton's *Beasts in the Cellar: The Exploitation Film Career of Tony Tenser* to shed some hopefully definitive light on the matter, but couldn't lay our hands on it. Perhaps a reader with a less chaotic library could help settle this matter – if, indeed, it can be settled.

DAVID R SUTTON

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

WAITING FOR THE END

Dutch family of seven locked in a basement for nine years by Austrian carpenter

A family who spent nine years in a basement “waiting for the end of time” have been discovered in the Netherlands. Gerrit-Jan van Dorsten, 67, and six of his children aged 18 to 25 were living in a farmhouse in the northern province of Drenthe. The alarm was sounded by Chris Westerbeek, a barman in the nearby village of Ruinerwold, when an unkempt 25-year-old man came by in a “confused” state on 13 October. Jan Zon van Dorsten “had long hair, a dirty beard, and wore old clothes,” said Mr Westerbeek. “The first time I saw him I sent him away, but a few days later he came back. Last week, he came in and ordered a few beers but we were going to shut. Last Sunday, he ordered five beers and drank them. Then I talked to him. He said he had run away and needed help. He said he’d never been to school and hadn’t been to the barber for nine years. He said he had brothers and sisters who lived at the farm. He was the oldest and wanted to end the way they were living.”

Police officers visited the remote farmhouse and discovered a hidden staircase behind a cupboard in the living room that led down to a basement room where the family lived. It is not known if they were held there against their will. Reports claimed the family were “waiting for the end of days”, and some of the younger siblings thought they were the only humans on Earth. Some could no longer talk properly and spoke in a bizarre “fantasy language”. Officers had great difficulty understanding the “incomprehensible” victims, who



slept and ate on the floor of the windowless room. It appeared the father had suffered a stroke several years ago and had been confined to bed. The children were taken to a holiday park, where they walked round in a circle together every 30 minutes in a ritual.

Ruinerwold has a population of less than 3,000. The farm is outside the village and is accessible by a bridge over a canal. A neighbour said he had only ever seen one man on the farm and no children. The local postman said he had never posted a letter there. “It’s actually pretty strange, now I come to think about it,” he said. The family seemed to be under the sway of Josef Brunner, 58, nicknamed “Josef the Austrian” by neighbours, who paid the rent on the farm, which he visited every day in a Volvo, tended the vegetable patch and looked after the goat and a few geese, and also did repairs. His arrest shocked locals, who had no idea there was anyone else at the house – which is 200 yards back from the road and surrounded by trees, high fences and CCTV

cameras. A neighbour told Dutch TV: “You only had to get close to the yard and he sent you away. He was watching everything with binoculars.” His estranged elder brother Franz said he was a “persuasive” guru who believes he is “better than Jesus”.

He reportedly joined a religious sect in the army, abandoned twins he fathered with a Japanese cult member, and had another “seven or eight children” with a wife that he also left behind when he moved to Holland. Franz said he was “greedy and lazy” and did not come home for either of his parents’ funerals. Josef moved in with a wealthy aunt, who made him her heir. When she died he sold her 300-year-old house and its land. That was around the time he grew close to Gerrit-Jan van Dorsten, who used to run a toy shop and a timber firm in Zwartsluis. After his wife died around 2008, leaving him a single father to five young children, Gerrit-Jan appears to have fallen further under the spell of Josef, his next-door neighbour in the Dutch town of Hasselt. The van Dorstens are thought to have

LEFT: The remote farm where van Dorsten and his children were found.

moved to the farmhouse near Ruinerwold in 2010, but were not registered with authorities.

Gerrit-Jan, despite being a recluse, was a prolific user of social media. He had uploaded hundreds of articles, videos and photos under the name John Eagles. He used Facebook to promote his daily exercise routine, and developed his own website, Eagle Rock Wiki, in which he set out his approach to religion and “creating a better world for everyone”. In other posts, he discussed whether NASA would build a farm on Mars and speculated as to what people who ‘died’ must see before they are resuscitated. The website entries stopped in 2016, around the time Gerrit-Jan is thought to have had his stroke. His eldest son, Jan Zon, began posting on social media in June this year, after nine years of silence. Why it took him another four months to seek help is a mystery.

Some sources make a connection with the Unification Church (aka Moonies), which was founded in 1954 and arrived in the Netherlands in 1965. Now calling itself the Universal Peace Federation, it confirmed van Dorsten “was briefly a member of our movement in the mid-1980s” but was “known to have mental health issues” and had left in 1987. They denied Brunner was ever a Moonie. *dutchnews.nl*, *BBC News*, 15 Oct; *D.Telegraph*, *Sun*, 16+17 Oct; *theguardian.com*, *dailymail.co.uk*, 18 Oct; *DutchNews.nl*, *metro.co.uk*, 21 Oct 2019.



LUMINOUS OWLS

Glow-in-the-dark ornithological oddities

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PANTHER ON THE ROOF

And other recent alien big cat sightings

PAGE 22



MID-AIR ENCOUNTER

Did the MoD cover up a 1956 UFO incident?

PAGE 26

THE CONSPIRASPHERE

Are climate change activists trying to save the planet (and kill off the human race) by promoting homosexuality? **NOEL ROONEY** grapples with this month's conspiracy theories...

FUNNY OLD WEATHER

There have been some pretty creative explanations for the phenomenon of climate change in recent years, not least Donald Trump's claim that it was invented by the Chinese government to sabotage the US automobile industry; but an article on Lifesite, picked up and run with by Conspiracy News, manages a synaptic spacewalk that drives the climate change story slap bang into the middle of the muddled minestrone of alt-right themes that nestle in the confused undergrowth of the Conspirasphere, waiting to be inadvertently slurped up and believed by innocent grazers.

Lifesite takes the appearance of Greta Thunberg, poster child for young climate change activists, at a Stockholm Gay Pride march, as evidence that proponents of climate change are intrinsically linked, via promotion of gay lifestyles, with the nefarious nexus of efforts to cull the human population. It seems to me that more conspiratorial profit might be earned by trying to work out where the currently ubiquitous Ms Thunberg has not been (those third-world countries whose economies, and likely populations, would be devastated by the proposed solutions to global warming presently advocated by the developed nations, for instance).

The article uses an oblique form of historical logic to make its case. Eugenics is linked to Darwinism, inasmuch as some early proponents of one were also supporters of the other, one assumes. From eugenics it is only a short step to birth control and, yes, the promotion of homosexuality is, by this logic, a natural heir (if that's an appropriate term in the circumstances) to the earlier stages of the depopulation agenda. Voila! Climate change alarmism is weaponised environmentalism, aimed at the unsuspecting target of tomorrow's children, the unborn, who are considerably more precious to the alt-right than the flesh and blood children who

already inhabit the planet. The slightly addled version of this theorising that appears on Conspiracy News is testament to the difficulty even hardened conspiracists are encountering in getting their heads around the evidential convolutions required to fit this new version of the jigsaw together.

Conspiracists regularly take things beyond the theoretical, unfortunately (the damages awarded to Leonard Pozner, father of the youngest victim of the Sandy Hook school shooting tragedy, ought to provide a sobering reminder of the potential consequences of taking things too far but the alt-right are nothing if not perseverant) and in Sweden, a bunch of religious right-wingers with too much time on their hands have filed a report claiming that Greta Thunberg is being exploited by her parents in a bid to push the climate agenda. They claim that Greta, who lives with Asperger's Syndrome, is being used as part of a carefully planned PR gambit, funded by suspects unknown, and with the collusion of her family, and that she is suffering mental health problems as a result. Articles in both the Conspirasphere and the red-top mainstream also claim that Greta's younger sister is a victim of bullying at school, as a consequence of the family's efforts to turn their daughter's climate change activism into an unethical income stream.

Whether Sweden's Child Services will do anything about the concerns of these concerned citizens remains to be seen; I'm not holding my breath, but moral panics have emerged from sparser evidence (Satanic child abuse being the perennial case in point). More broadly, the report just adds to the growing body of conspiracy theory around Greta Thunberg and her actions, which in turn adds to the increasingly complex web of theories around climate change activism, and its connection to the global plot to depopulate the planet, enslave the survivors, turn all the lights off, censor the Internet and take all our guns.

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

NUN WAS BEHEADED 'TO BRING LUCK'

Times, 24 May 2019.

Fungal hallucinogens send cicadas on sex binges after their genitals fall off

Sciencealert.com, 29 June 2019.

THAIS WARNED: IF YOU GET A BONE STUCK IN YOUR THROAT DON'T SUCK ON A CAT'S PAW!

The Nation (Thailand), 25 June 2019.

Tadpoles to get robot bodyguards

Moreton Border News (Australia), 26 July 2019.

UNDERTAKERS HIT AS FEWER PEOPLE DYING

Bristol Post, 14 May 2019.

Tipperary banish demons after fiery affray

Irish Times, 19 Aug 2019



CIRCLE OF LIFE

Thousands of pilgrims gathered in Bulgaria's Rila mountains on 19 August to welcome their "spiritual" New Year with a cosmic dance performed in concentric circles. The white-clad dancers hiked up to Bulgaria's Seven Rila Lakes at an altitude of 2,100m (6,900ft) and performed a special meditative dance known as "paneurythmy" for more than an hour to singing and the playing of violins. They are followers of the Universal White Brotherhood – an esoteric society that combines Christianity and Indian mysticism, founded by Bulgarian theologian Peter Deunov back in 1897 but banned during the Communist era and still considered a sect by the Orthodox Church. It emphasises brotherly love, healthy habits, positive thinking and living in harmony with nature.

"Paneurythmy, the Sacred Bulgarian Dance of Life, starts the day in joyous celebration of our oneness with Nature and the Cosmos. An expression of Divinity in form, Light in motion, Paneurythmy unites heaven and earth through a series of 28 easily learned movements in a rhythmic circular walking dance. Balancing and honouring our expression of life on all levels, we become the mobile conduit between heaven and earth, Nature and the Cosmos. The flowers and trees do this



naturally, but we become this channel in conscious motion. We are the movement or procession of Life through form. The Universe and Nature support us through the music, movement and our own joyous intent." (gardenofsananda.com/paneury.html)

The movement does not keep track of its numbers but is believed to have tens of thousands of followers worldwide, possibly more – the majority in France, Belgium and Switzerland but also as far as the US, Canada, Mexico, Iceland and the

Democratic Republic of Congo. Its followers believe that positive cosmic energy is at its strongest in the region of the Seven Rila Lakes around 19 August and that paneurythmy will help them channel it and spread it around the world. Medical research published in 2013 suggested that regular practice of paneurythmy improves balance and physical endurance while lowering aggression, boosting optimism and combating depression. [AFP] 19 Aug 2019. **PHOTOS: NIKOLAY DOYCHINOV / AFP / GETTY IMAGES**



SIDELINES...

ABDUCTION MEMORIAL

An historical marker has been placed beside the river in Pascagoula, southern Mississippi, where Charles Hickson (42) and Calvin Parker (19) had their famous 'alien abduction' on 11 October 1973. [AP] 25 June 2019.

WORMS TURN

Nematode worms found buried in the Siberian permafrost have been reawakened after more than 40,000 years, raising the possibility of long-extinct species being brought back to life. "These buggers survive just about anything," said researcher Gaetan Borgonie, from Gentbrugge, Belgium. Sun, 9 July 2019.

BOOK RIPPER

Someone has struck up to 15 times a week between April and July, tearing the last pages of more than 200 books in half and removing the bottom half, rendering the tomes unsellable. The phantom shredder of Herne Bay, who has targeted the library and a charity shop in the Kent seaside town, remains at large. D.Mail, 6 July; <i>12 July 2019.

ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

News has emerged of a petition to the Edinburgh Dean of Guild Court, dated 23 November 1705. Adam Kerr protested that his baker's shop near Fishmarket Close was being ruined by dung and water coming from the floor above, where Dutchman Abraham Sever was keeping an elephant, which he had been exhibiting round Edinburgh for a month. Owner Bartel Verhagen had toured the female pachyderm around Europe in the 1680s and 1690s. She died in Dundee in 1706. edinburghlive.co.uk, 2 July; D.Express, 4 July 2019.



GASLIGHT REVISITED | A killer churchwarden who targeted elderly victims

Patrick Hamilton's 1938 stage play *Gas Light*, adapted for cinema as the British thriller *Gaslight* in 1940 (directed by Thorold Dickinson), followed in 1944 by an American version, also titled *Gaslight* and directed by George Cukor, features a scheming husband who attempts, by various cunning deceptions, to convince his wife that she is going mad. Thus, the term 'gaslighting' has become part of the English lexicon.

A bizarre, real-life equivalent made the news in August 2019 when Benjamin Field, outwardly a quiet, bespectacled, churchwarden aged 28, was found guilty of murdering his elderly lover, 69-year-old university lecturer Peter Farquhar, who lived alone in the village of Maids Moreton, Buckinghamshire. The devout Christian experienced terrifying hallucinations of "hideous black insects" and believed he was being "attacked by rays of light". Field, the son of a Baptist minister and ostensibly a sincere Christian himself, had been lacing Mr Farquhar's chocolates and toast with the psychedelic drug 2-CB over a six-month period. He had also spiked his whisky with pure alcohol and plied him with sedatives. Part of the elaborate deception involved a 'betrothal' ceremony between Field and Mr Farquhar, who had struggled to reconcile his



ABOVE: Benjamin Field (right) laced the food of University lecturer Peter Farquhar (left) with hallucinogenic drugs and plied his victim with sedatives before murdering him.

One diary entry discussed a plan to kill 50 people in a single night

homosexuality with his Christian faith. Believing he was no longer of sound mind, the bachelor, by now suffering night terrors and hallucinations, and observed by friends to be slurring his speech, was persuaded to alter his will in favour of his young lover. He was suffocated by Field in October 2015, who disguised the death as being the result of chronic alcoholism, gaining £20,000 from

the will plus £140,000 via the sale of the house.

At the same time, Field was using a similar ruse on 83-year-old Ann Moore-Martin who lived three doors down from Mr Farquhar. The deeply religious former headmistress was lured into a sexual relationship with Field, who had a string of other lovers as well as her and Mr Farquhar. The infatuated Ms Moore-Martin was said to have behaved like a "love-struck teenager" and she too agreed to sign over her will to Field, but was persuaded to reverse the decision when her niece became suspicious. After being hospitalised for a seizure, Ms Moore-Martin told a friend that Field had given her a white powder "to help her sleep".

As before, she had been 'gaslighted', with various objects being hidden around her home to make her think she was losing her mind. Field also wrote "messages from God" on her bathroom mirror, such as: "Ben needs prayer and he loves you" and "All that you give him will be returned tenfold".

Ms Moore-Martin died in May 2017, apparently of natural causes, and although Field was acquitted of her murder, police believe he may have been responsible for her death and that of at least two other elderly people. Two of Ms Moore-Martin's neighbours, Harold



ABOVE: Field wrote 'messages from God' on Ann Moore-Martin's bathroom mirror.



and Elaine Meakin, died in suspicious circumstances. Mrs Meakin died suddenly in 2015 after drinking a cup of tea, and one year later her husband died after apparently falling downstairs. During the trial it was revealed that Field had discussed killing Mr Farquhar by pushing him down the stairs, and had also spiked his tea with drugs.

Field is thought to have targeted residents of a care home in the village whilst working there. He would volunteer to drive them home after funerals and would quiz them about their lives, whether they lived alone, and seemed “clearly fascinated by the elderly”. He had drawn up a database of 100 possible ‘clients’, mostly lonely pensioners, but including his brother, sister, parents and grandparents. Police also found Field’s list of potential methods of death, including car

crashes, involuntary overdoses and inducing heart failure during sex. One diary entry discussed a plan to kill up to 50 people in a single night.

An elderly widow, now in her eighties, explained how she had been convinced to leave part of her estate to the young son of Ms Setara Pracha, a 50-year-old Buckingham University lecturer and one of Field’s numerous lovers. There is no suggestion that Ms Pracha was part of the plan; indeed, her elderly mother was on Field’s “client database”. The widow described a holiday with Field, a friend, and Ms Pracha.

“They were odd people”, said the widow. “We wandered around a place near the edge of the cliffs, and I have wondered if I was meant to go over them”. Sensing danger, she changed her will back again and ceased all contact with Field. “I must have been hypnotised to do it”,

she speculated. “I am normally pretty savvy about this type of thing”.

Although financial gain was clearly a motive, the trial held at Oxford Crown Court heard that Field had a “death obsession” and a fascination with killing. He denied having murdered Mr Farquhar and Ms Moore-Martin but admitted having fraudulently pretended to be in a relationship with both of them. Regarding his two-year relationship with Mr Farquhar, Field said: “The essential lie was that I loved him”. He told the court “I have deceived absolutely everybody that I have any kind of relationship with”.

Field was sentenced to life imprisonment with a minimum term of 36 years. *Metro*, 2+3+21 May; *Sun*, 2+3+4 May, 10 Aug; *BBC News*, 9 Aug; *D.Telegraph*, 11 June, 10 Aug; *theguardian.com*, 18 Oct 2019.

Christopher Josiffe

SIDELINES...

SWAN STRANGLED

On 30 May, a woman grabbed a swan, straddled it, and wrung its neck. A member of the public, who witnessed the outrage in Riverside Park, Chester-le-Street, Co Durham, called the police and the RSPCA. Anyone who steals, kills or injures a swan without a licence can face up to six months in jail and a fine. The Queen owns every unmarked mute swan in open water in her realm. *D.Mirror*, 6 June 2019.

SWAN KILLS DOG

Just before 11am on 29 June, a cocker spaniel was swimming near a group of swans and their cygnets in a pond at Bush Park in Dublin, when an adult swan broke away from the group and beat the dog to death with its wings. A witness said the swan lifted up its wings and attacked the dog “with one wing and then the other. That stunned the poor thing. Three or four more slaps and she was gone.” *Irish Times*, 2 July; *Fox News*, 3 July 2019.

LOVECRAFT TRIBUTE

A many-tentacled ancestor of sea cucumbers found by palaeontologists at a Herefordshire site – 430 million years old, with a maximum size of one inch (2.5cm) – has been named *Sollasina cthulu*. *sputniknews.com* 10 April 2019.

BIRTH NUMBERS

In Bermondsey, south London, after a seven-hour labour beginning at 7pm, Millie Chapman gave birth to a daughter on July 7 (7/7), weighing 7lb 7oz. She needed seven stitches. Then at 7:11pm on July 11 (7/11) in St Louis, Missouri, Rachel Langford gave birth to J’amie Brown, weighing 7lb 11oz. “A lot of the times (during the pregnancy) I would look at the clock and it was 7:11,” said Ms Langford. *wymt.com*, 13 July; *D.Express*, 6 Aug 2019.

SAVED BY HIS ANATOMY

A 64-year-old heart surgeon stabbed by a patient at Kaiser-Franz-Josef Hospital in Vienna on 10 July survived because his liver was on the ‘wrong’ side of his body. After the stabbing the assailant, 33-year-old Paul J, calmly sat and waited for police to arrive. *D.Mirror*, 12 July 2019.

MUSIC HATH CHARMS

- Dubstep music may be an effective mosquito repellent, according to a recent study. When scientists played Skrillex’s ‘Scary Monsters and Nice Sprites’ track (which has a mix of very high and very low frequencies) to female *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, responsible for the spread of both the dengue and Zika viruses, they attacked their hosts much less frequently and also mated less often. *D.Telegraph*, 1 April; *Metro*, 11 April 2019.

- Other music genres recently deployed in cutting-edge research were hip-hop, opera and classic rock. In an eight-month experiment at Bern University of the Arts, nine wheels of Swiss Emmentaler cheese were subjected to, variously, A Tribe Called Quest’s ‘Jazz (We’ve Got)’, Mozart’s ‘Magic Flute’, and Led Zeppelin’s ‘Stairway to Heaven’. The aim was to see whether the cheese’s flavour and aroma could be improved. In taste tests, the effects of



ABOVE: Low end theory: the impact of classic hip-hop on Swiss cheese.

A Tribe Called Quest’s 1991 tune came off best, and researchers are now planning to expose several other types of cheese to hip-hop sounds. *[R] Swissinfo*, 14 Mar 2019.

- In a more sophisticated study using macaque monkeys as subjects, low-intensity ultrasound targeted at specific areas of the brain has been found to alter the animals’ decision-making processes by modulating brain activity. A human trial is currently

in progress, examining this non-invasive method of inducing behavioural change as a potential treatment for Alzheimer’s and dementia. As well as gerontologists, various military and law enforcement agencies are no doubt following the progress of the human trial with keen interest. *Nature Neuroscience*, *newatlas.com*, 16 April 2019. *Guardian*, 14 Sept 2011; *BBC News*, 29 April 2016, 22 June 2019, *Sunday Express*, *Sunday Telegraph*, 23 June 2019.

FABRICE COFFRINI / AFP / GETTY IMAGES



SIDELINES...

AN ORTHODOX VIEW

In a short video posted to YouTube on 23 July, the Most Reverend Metropolitan Neophytos (Mansouras) of Morfou of the Church of Cyprus said the lack of spirituality and knowledge of Christ and the Orthodox religion creates homosexuals, and claimed that if a pregnant woman enjoys anal sex, this will transfer to the baby and it will be gay. *gaystarnews.com*, 28 July 2019.

LOO EXPLODES

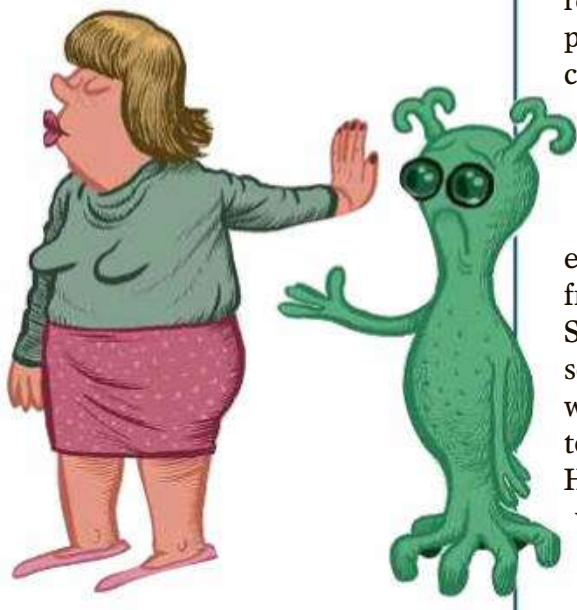
On 4 August, lightning destroyed a septic tank in Port Charlotte, Florida, and shattered Marylou Ward's lavatory pan, as the bolt had ignited methane that had built up in the plumbing. *D.Mirror*, 10 Aug 2019.

EATING RAW SQUIRRELS

Two activists who ate squirrels outside the Soho Vegan Food Market in Rupert Street, London, on 30 March were fined £600 for public order offenses. Deonisy Khlebnikov (22) and Gatis Lagzdins (29), both Londoners, chewed on the furry carcasses and continued despite requests to stop after children cried. One activist wore a T-shirt proclaiming: "Veganism = malnutrition". *BBC News*, 23 July; *D.Mail*, 24 July 2019.

MAKING CONTACT

In a survey conducted by Oxford University, asking whether humanity should initiate contact with aliens, fewer than half of women thought it was a good idea, compared with nearly two-thirds of men. Overall, some 56.3% of Britons said they were in favour of contacting aliens. *D.Telegraph*, 11 Sept 2019.



MARTIN ROSS

THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO | Flying dino sightings from around the USA



CULTURE CLUB / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: US skies are alive with 'pterosaurs' according to witnesses such as Cynthia Lee (below), who reported three sightings.

- A married man from Gary, Indiana, claimed to have seen a "prehistoric looking creature" flying over a motorway one morning at 6am in August 2015. He had been returning home from Michigan City, Indiana, "travelling down Interstate 80/94 westbound to the Broadway exit south to Gary". It was then that he saw the huge airborne beast flying "southeast behind a gas station into a wooded area". Upon returning home where he googled images of prehistoric birds, the witness was convinced he had seen a pterodactyl. Then, a year later in August 2016, the man claimed to have seen the same creature, again in the early morning, close to his previous sighting at Interstate 80/94. He reached for his phone to take a picture, but unfortunately the creature "swooped down and disappeared into a wooded area west of Martin Luther King Drive".

The man recounted his experiences to investigators from the Singular Fortean Society. His first indication of something unusual, he said, was a "massive shadow – 30 to 40 yards [27-37m] long". He estimated the creature's wingspan at around 40ft (12m), and that it had been about 20-30ft (6-9m) off the ground.



Thus, he was close enough to observe its "dark, grayish" colour, with "smooth, leathery skin", a pointed crest on its head, and "huge, egg-shaped eyes", bright greenish yellow with no apparent iris or pupil. He was emphatic that its wings did not flap, but that it was gliding as it swooped down over cars and trucks on the highway. He told his wife about his first encounter, but she was doubtful until she herself sighted something very similar, in the same vicinity, again disappearing into woodland.

Gary, Indiana, is about four miles (6.5km) south of Lake Michigan, which has been the location of several other "big bird" sightings, which ostensibly began in spring 2017, but more and more people (like the married couple above) are coming forward with their own, earlier accounts as news of the

phenomenon spreads. Most sightings take place near the lakefront at Chicago, typically in the evening or at night, often near a park or a body of water. Reports consistently describe a large bird- or bat-like creature, sometimes having glowing eyes, either yellow, orange or red (echoes of Mothman?), with arms and legs often mentioned.

Aside from the yellow eyes, there are clearly significant differences between these sightings and those of the married couple, whose encounters took place in the early morning. The presence of water, combined with limited visibility of dusk or night, has led some sceptics to suggest that large water birds are being spotted rather than anything cryptozoological.

Meanwhile, Utah-based cryptozoologist Jonathan Whitcomb has collected reports of alleged 'pterosaur' sightings in 33 states plus Washington DC. North Carolina appears to be a particular hotspot with nine claimed incidents. One Raleigh NC woman claims to have seen the flying dinosaurs on three separate occasions in 2017 and 2018. Cynthia Lee, 20, said her latest sighting had taken place at a North Raleigh bus stop. After spotting a huge shadow on the ground, she looked up



MONKEY BUSINESS IN TEXAS

An unidentified humanoid creature was repeatedly spotted in the city of Santa Fe in Texas. The alarm was first raised in the early hours of 9 September, when Patricia de la Mora called the police to say she had seen some kind of primate causing pandemonium on the corner of 24th and East Bellaire Streets in the south west of the city. She had apparently been woken up after midnight by thunder and lightning, heard “strange noises”, opened the curtains and was “paralysed by fear”. She did not have time to get her phone, but stood at her



bedroom window stunned by what she saw. Police searched for an hour, but no trace of the animal was found. The following day, police received a similar report from a woman in the same part of town. “Just had a monkey try to attack me, while checking my mail,” she said on Facebook. “I’ve spent the last 20 minutes in

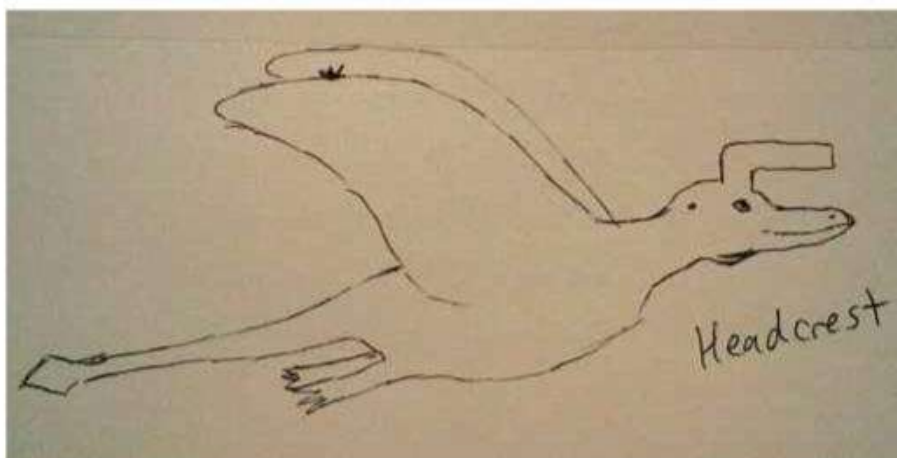
my car.” Police again launched a futile search for any physical manifestation of the supposed monkey. Several residents in the area then reported on social media they had seen a monkey, with one person claiming the creature had tried to kidnap their cat, and another saying a child had been “attacked”. Drones were flown round the area, but no monkey was spotted. “We have two reports that seem legitimate,” said Bayou Animal Services. “However, no visual proof from any authorities. No pictures. No videos.” *Independent, 11 Sept 2019.*

to see a large creature in the air, having “a long tail with a diamond-shaped bulb on it” (presumably on the end of the tail). “It was dark brown”, Lee said, adding: “it had this weird crest”. A month later, Lee says she saw a pair of ‘pterosaurs’, without feathers and, on this occasion, without crests. Her third encounter took place during an Uber journey to work. Looking out of the car window,

she saw the same earlier crested beast as before. Frustratingly, the driver saw nothing, because, Lee explained, “he was driving. He said he wished he saw it”. Lee also told investigator Whitcomb that her mother and uncle had seen one of the flying creatures many years ago, when they were playing outdoors as children.

Lee is not the only witness, however. In March 2013, a man

driving on Interstate 450 in Raleigh said he saw a “HUGE bird looking thing fly across the overpass I was on, maybe 20-25ft [6-7.6m] in front of my car and about seven or eight feet [2-2.5m] off the ground”. He described it as “bat-like in a way”, having a “LONG tail with a spade at the end”. (This might tally with Cynthia Lee’s sighting of the creature with the “long tail and diamond-shaped bulb”. Doubters suspect that witnesses have really seen a species of large bird; the great blue heron, for example, may have a wingspan of up to 79in (2m). (The goliath heron and great white-bellied heron are even bigger, but neither are native to North America). But witnesses often emphasise the lack of feathers, having instead leathery or smooth skin, as well as far greater size. In 1993, a Durham NC man said he saw something with “huge, bat-like wings” and an estimated wingspan of 10-15ft (3-4.5m). A 2010 sighting in Jacksonville, NC, has the witness describe “something huge above me in the sky. It looked like a pale greenish white and smooth-skinned. It didn’t appear to have any feathers, and it had the tail with the diamond shape on the end”. *charlottestories.com, Fayetteville (NC) Observer, 12 Jan 2018; singularfortean.com, 28 Jan 2019.* For more Thunderbird data, see **FT105:34-38.**



ABOVE: Cynthia Lee’s sketch of one of the creatures, and a great blue heron.

SIDELINES...

INDIAN METEORITE

On 22 July, a football-sized meteorite crashed into a paddy field in Madhubani district in the eastern Indian state of Bihar, startling farmers who saw “a fireball-like object coming down from the sky”, which sent up clouds of “smoke”. Residents of Mahadeva village later dug up the 15kg (33lb) light brown missile from a 5ft (150cm)-deep hole. It was reported to have strong magnetic properties. *theguardian.com, 25 July 2019.*

‘GOD’ FRUSTRATED

A Delta Air Lines pilot arrested a passenger who tried to enter the cockpit in an incident that forced a New York-bound plane to return to Puerto Rico. The man yelled: “I am God! Tomorrow San Juan is going to disappear! I came to save the world, and I’m going to end terrorism!” *<i>4 July 2019.*

FAR FROM HOME

Grandmother Dot Crow saw an African sacred ibis in her garden in Braunston, Northamptonshire, eating her hens’ cream crackers on a table. Ancient Egyptians believed an ibis was the embodiment of Thoth, god of writing, knowledge, art and magic (among other things). *Sun, 14 Aug 2019.*

SINGING DETECTORISTS

On 24 August, 13 people at a metal detecting convention in Yorkshire were hospitalised after eating cannabis-laced chocolate cake. They were celebrating Gary Cook’s 50th birthday and he shared the cake, unaware of its composition. The detectorists burst into song, started dancing or collapsed on the floor of a marquee in the village of High Melton. A 48-year-old woman was arrested. *D.Telegraph, Metro, 28 Aug 2019.*



MARTIN ROSS



STRANGE DAYS

SIDELINES...

BITING BACK

Raj Kumar was at home in Uttar Pradesh, India, when he was bitten by a snake – so he bit it back and killed it. “He chewed it to pieces,” said his father, Babu Ram. *D.Star*, 30 July 2019.

BOUR-BURN

More than 45,000 barrels of Jim Beam bourbon went up in smoke in a warehouse blaze in Woodford County, Kentucky, that may have been started by a lightning strike. Fire crews let it burn for several hours to prevent distilled spirits running into a nearby creek and contaminating drinking water. The heat was so fierce it melted fire engine headlamps. *Metro*, 4 July 2019.

RECORD LITTER

Last April, a four-year-old Irish setter called Amelia gave birth to a record litter of 16 pups by caesarean section at Seadown Veterinary Group’s hospital in Hythe, Southampton. One pup was so small it did not survive. Irish setters usually have litters of eight or nine at most. The canine birth record is held by Tia, a Neapolitan mastiff from Cambridgeshire, who gave birth to 24 pups in 2004. *D.Mail*, 27 July 2019.

DOGS SAVE BABY

CCTV caught a woman throwing a baby wrapped in plastic into a muddy street drain in Kaithal, a town in the Indian state of Haryana, early one morning in July. A pack of at least three street dogs, hearing the infant’s wails, pulled it out of the drain, pawed at the plastic package and started barking, alerting passers-by. The police were called and the child – weighing less than 1.1kg (39oz) – was taken to hospital. *Times*, 22 July 2019.

TAKEN FUR DEAD

The Hereford family Robinson were surprised when their oriental tabby Willow returned home somewhat the worse for wear – after his funeral. “We did our grieving, though we kept hoping Willow would come back,” they said. But Willow’s weeping owners had buried a mystery moggie by mistake. This is not unusual; Sally Barber, of Essex, also buried what she believed to be the remains of her beloved cat Beebz, before he strolled in through the front door. *D.Mirror*, 27 Mar, 20 July 2018.

DAY OF THE DEAD BARBIE



Mattel has unveiled a new version of their iconic Barbie doll, inspired by Mexico’s traditional Day of the Dead celebration (1-2 November). The doll – to be sold for \$75 – is based on the famous “Catrina” character drawn by cartoonist

Jose Guadalupe Posada in 1912. She has skeleton face paint and wears a black gown decorated with marigolds, butterflies and skulls. The Day of the Dead festival is believed to be when the gateway separating the living and the dead

opens, allowing people to pay their respects to those who have reached the Other Shore. More than a billion Barbies have been sold globally since the American brand’s launch 60 years ago. *[AFP]* 13 Sept 2019.

PEDRO PARDO / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

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Luminous owls

DAVID HAMBLING heads to Norfolk and beyond in search of glow-in-the-dark barn owls

If you see an eerie light passing silently across the landscape, you might be inclined to suspect aliens. But a century ago such a light might be put down to a very different cause: glowing owls. And, as with aliens, believers and sceptics fought it out in the media.

The barn owl is a familiar sight in the British countryside, with its buff wings, and pure white chest and underparts. Ornithologists believe this light coloration is a kind of camouflage for night-hunting, disguising its silhouette against a light sky from below. At twilight, the pale owl shows up vividly and can be a startling sight; it is sometimes called the ghost owl. But could these birds not just reflect light but actually emit it?

Writing in the first century, Pliny mentioned a bird in the Hercynian Forest in Germany that glowed in the dark. There were few other reports until the naturalist Sir Thomas Digby Pigott, of Sheringham, Norfolk, wrote to the *Times* newspaper in December 1907, describing a luminous barn owl also witnessed by several local people. The glow was likened to a bicycle lamp “seen three or four hundred yards off” and was bright enough to illuminate the branches of a tree on which the owl was perching.

Norfolk has a history of glowing owls. In 1897 gamekeeper Frederick Rolfe saw a bright blue light fly past repeatedly at West Bilney near King’s Lynn. He returned with his shotgun and eventually bagged the source some nights later. “You might fancy my surprise when I found... a barn owl dead on the ground,” said Rolfe, quoted in the *Eastern Daily Press*.

In 1898 the same paper recorded the capture of another unusual bird by Edward Cannell of Lower Hellesdon. “I saw something shining on the grass bank, which for the moment startled me,” said Cannell. “I had no trouble in catching it, and I did not hurt it in any way. It was an owl, and it was bright and luminous.” Cannell brought the owl indoors, but it died shortly afterwards of natural causes.

In both cases, the glow faded rapidly after the death of the bird, leaving no trace. JH Gurney, a noted ornithologist, called luminous barn owls “an attested reality” in 1908, based on sightings from



reliable observers in Norfolk. There were a few other accounts from further afield. A correspondent signing themselves ‘a country teacher’, replying to Pigott’s letter in the *Times*, said that he had regularly seen a pair of glowing owls in Shropshire in 1892, where they were known as ‘lantern birds’, or *glim ullert* (shining owl).

After reading the reports in the *Times*, Mildred Dobbs described her own encounter with glowing owls at Villierstown in Ireland. The ferryman with whom she was travelling pointed out a couple of moving lights that he said were birds. Dobbs thought they looked like bicycle lamps going down a nearby road until one changed direction. “One light turned and went rapidly back, past Strancally, crossed the river (which is quite 200 yards at that point) keeping about 60ft [18m] above it, and after a few seconds it began going along the opposite hillside and then after about a minute disappeared.” Dobbs had several subsequent sightings of the birds, and observed that the glow was only visible from in front, suggesting it came from the owls’ chests.

The speculation triggered quite a debate, and some ridiculed Pigott’s ‘wonderful owls’ out of hand. Some were more sympathetic; fellow Norfolk naturalist Sydney Long suggested that the glow might come from contact with phosphorescent fungi, known as foxfire or fairy fire, which grow on decaying tree stumps, but was mocked by his colleague Arthur Pattersen: “Maybe the owl was taking a field mouse home for his supper, wrapped in a luminous mushroom as we wrap up hot chips in paper,” Pattersen scoffed.

Another suggestion was that the glow might be a fungal infection, as a feather fungus affecting geese was well known. The ‘country teacher’ noted that the glow

only seemed to appear when the birds were in poor condition, and the owl captured by Edward Rolfe was obviously at death’s door. However there are no such infectious fungi known that glow in the dark.

Less plausible was the idea that the glow was electrical. Pigott quoted a fisherman who had written to him: “About four we were all surprised to find something blowing about just like blue fire. Our mittens and the edges

of our sou’-westers were soon full; it hung to them like cobwebs, and some parts of it were very bright. I thought you would like to know about this, as it would be about the same time the luminous owl was seen, and I do not see why it should not hang on a bird’s feathers as well as it did on us.”

The luminosity seems to be almost entirely confined to barn owls. There is one notable exception, with several reported sightings of glowing night herons in the US. Perhaps some daytime birds glow as well, but the effect is only likely to be observed on nocturnal ones that fly by night.

However, none of the ornithologists I contacted knew of any recent reports. “There were a few back in the 1980s or 1990s I think, from memory, possibly off the back of an article in a popular magazine,” says Mike Toms of the British Trust for Ornithology. “I am not aware of any recent reports of luminous barn owls.”

Perhaps it was all based on misperception and mistaken reports, with owls glimmering in the faint light rather than actually glowing. Then again, it may have been a genuine luminous phenomenon which has become vanishingly rare, like will o’ the wisp marsh lights (see **FT370:14**). But despite the growing number of birders with their increasingly sophisticated camera gear, it remains doubtful whether we will ever get a decent picture, and the question of whether owls can glow will be forever unanswered.

Editor’s note: Fort covers this subject briefly in chapter 10 of *Lo! (Books, pp.625-627)*. For a detailed review of luminous owl sightings up to the 1920s, see “The luminous owls of Norfolk” by David W Clarke in *Fortean Studies # 1* (1994), pp.50-57.



IG NOBEL PRIZES 2019 | More improbable research involving children's saliva, bacteria-laden banknotes and itchy ankles

PHOTO BY KYODO NEWS VIA GETTY IMAGES

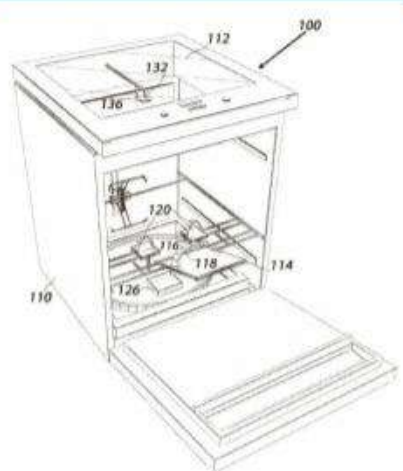


ABOVE: Shigeru Watanabe, a professor of pediatric dentistry, was a proud winner. BELOW: Iman Farahbakhsh's nappy-changing machine.

The 2019 Ig Nobel Prizes, published in the *Annals of Improbable Research*, were awarded on 12 September at Harvard's Sanders Theatre, where an eight-year-old girl was on duty to enforce the one-minute rule on winners' speeches with the devastating line: "Please stop, I'm bored." They honour achievements that make people laugh and then think, and have been awarded every year since 1991. The winners each receive a meagre cash prize: a \$10 trillion banknote from Zimbabwe.

Research measuring if there is a difference in temperature between the left and right testicles won the Anatomy Prize this year. Fertility experts Roger Mieusset and Bourras Bengoudifa measured the temperature of French postmen's testicles, both naked and clothed. They found the left one is warmer, but only when a man has his clothes on. In their paper "Thermal Asymmetry of the Human Scrotum" (*Human Reproduction*, vol. 22, no.8, 2007,

Pizza might protect against illness and death if eaten in Italy



pp. 2178-2182), the researchers explained their experiment involved measuring scrotal temperatures with probes every two minutes. They asked 11 postal workers to stand for 90 minutes while they measured the temperature of their scrotums (scrota?). In another experiment,

they measured the temperatures of 11 bus drivers while they were sitting down. Other research has suggested the temperature around testicles can affect men's fertility. The quality of human sperm in the Western world is in decline, but little is known about how to improve it.

The Medicine Prize went to Silvano Gallus for collecting evidence that pizza might protect against illness and death, if the pizza is made and eaten in Italy; while the Prize for Medical Education went to Karen Pryor and Theresa McKeon, for showing that acoustic clickers used in dog training also boost the skills of students of orthopaedic surgery.

The Biology Prize was won by an international team for discovering that dead magnetised cockroaches behave differently from living magnetised cockroaches when studied with a quantum sensor. Another international team won the Peace Prize for trying to measure the pleurability of

scratching an itch. Itchy ankles ranked highest, followed by the back and forearm. "I was over the moon when I heard [we had won]," said Francis McGlone, a researcher at Liverpool John Moores University. "The thing that's fascinated me for a long while now is why is scratching an itch so bloody nice?"

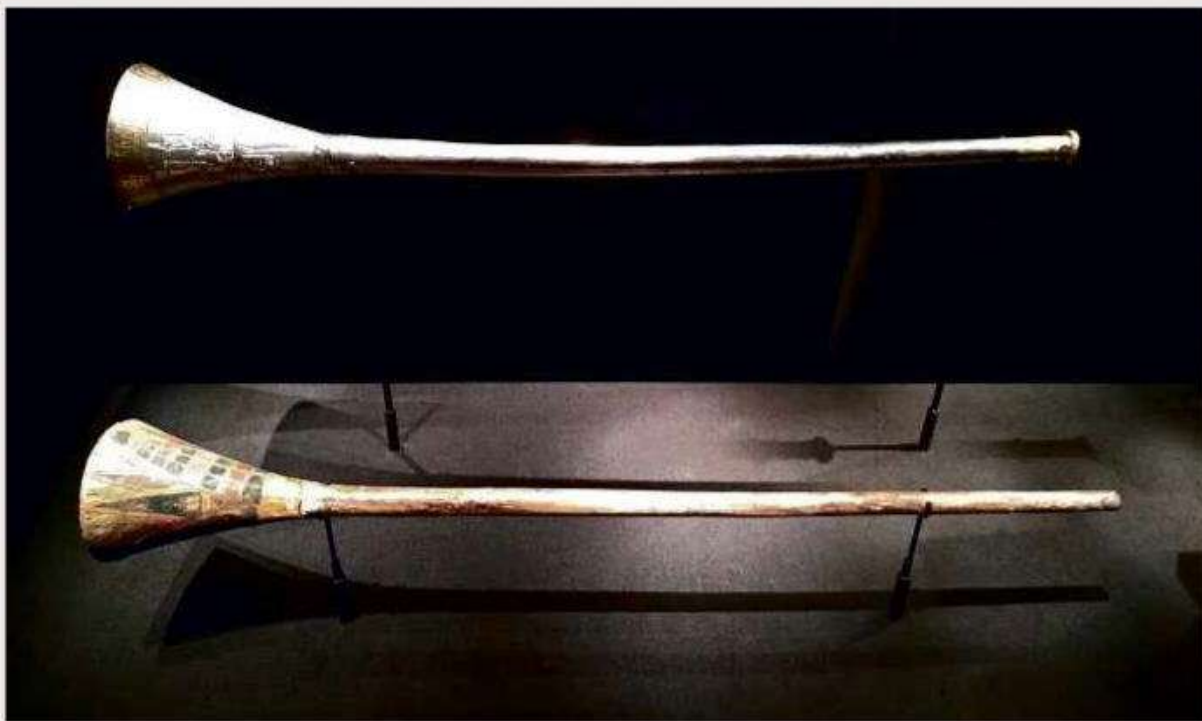
The Chemistry Prize went to a group of Japanese academics for estimating the total saliva volume produced per day by a typical five-year-old child (half a litre). Iman Farahbakhsh from Iran won the Engineering Prize for inventing a nappy- (diaper-) changing machine for use on human infants. It's basically a restraining device that looks like an oven, into which the child is seated and secured so human nappy-changers can perform their task unhindered. The apparatus (patent awarded) also sprays parts of the child down and then dries them. Full details are available with the patent application.

The Economics Prize was awarded for testing which country's paper money is best at transmitting dangerous bacteria: the winner was the Romanian leu. The study concluded that three types of drug-resistant bacteria clung the longest to Romanian money when compared to several other international currencies, including the euro, US and Canadian dollars, and Indian rupees. The Psychology Prize was won by Fritz Strack from Germany, for discovering that holding a pen in one's mouth makes one smile, which makes one happier – and for then discovering, 30 years later, that it does not.

The Physics Prize was won by a bunch of academics from Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Taiwan, UK and USA for studying how, and why, wombats make cube-shaped turds [see FT376:7]. *improbable.com*, BBC News, 13 Sept; *Guardian*, 14 Sept 2019. For last year's Ig Nobel winners, see FT372:14.



PAUL DEVEREUX, Managing Editor of *Time & Mind*, digs up the latest archaeological discoveries



ABOVE: The silver and gold plated trumpet and its painted wooden core from the tomb of Tutankhamun.

SOUNDS OF WAR

In 1922, archaeologist Howard Carter famously discovered the tomb of the ‘boy king’, Tutankhamen, the 13th pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty of New Kingdom era Egypt, who ruled between c.1334 – 1325 BC. The finding of the largely intact tomb with its rich array of grave goods aroused much interest, and continues to do so. It also raised speculations about a supposed curse, fuelled by coincidental subsequent deaths of some of those associated with the discovery [see p32 for more on this subject]. Here, we look at two of the grave goods that combine something of all this – long, delicate trumpets, one of silver, the other bronze, complete with their painted wooden cores. They were military trumpets, for heralding the king or rallying his troops to battle.

The coincidences began in 1939, when a radio presenter wondered what the trumpets sounded like. He persuaded archaeologists to perform an experiment at the Egyptian Museum, with a British military bandsman doing the honours. But the first attempts produced a “raucous sound” and damaged the instrument. It was repaired, and a second attempt was made during a BBC live broadcast that had 150 million listeners. The bandsman fitted a modern mouthpiece on both trumpets and this time the effort was successful, with the silver trumpet especially producing powerful sounds. A few months later, Britain entered World War II. The next time the silver trumpet was played was in 1967, just prior to the Six-Day War between Egypt and Israel. When it was played again in 1990, its sounding preceded the outbreak of the Gulf War. And its most recent use was in 2011, promptly followed by the Egyptian Revolution. *Classic FM*, 29 Aug 2019.

RE-EMERGENCE

In 1963, the ‘Dolmen of Guadalperal’, near the city of Cáceres, Spain, disappeared from view beneath the waters of the Valdecañas Reservoir. The site was thought to be about 5,000 years old. The megalithic structure consisted of some 144 granite standing stones, some up to 2m (7ft) tall, arranged in a concentric circle with stones forming a dolmen (a single-chamber tomb), at the entrance to which stood a menhir carved with a serpent-like motif. The whole megalithic assemblage had at some point in time been surrounded by a pebble wall. The monument had first been excavated by a German archaeologist in the 1920s, but unearthed coins showed the Romans had known of it too.



ABOVE: The low water level of the Valdecañas Reservoir this year left the ‘Dolmen of Guadalperal’ fully visible.

Locals had heard stories about the monument and at least one had once seen tips of the stones poking above the water’s surface. Now a severe drought has revealed the whole ruined structure – but the stones are, variously, showing signs of erosion, or have fallen over, or beginning to crack. There is concern about the future of the monument, but at the moment it is left unguarded. *Euro Weekly*, 26 Aug 2019; *Smithsonian Magazine*, 9 Sept 2019.

A FRENCH SUPRISE

Spread along a sloping area, 30 prehistoric megaliths have been discovered during routine rescue excavations ahead of works on the A75 motorway near Veyre-Monton, between Clermont-Ferrand and Issoire, in Puy-de-Dôme (Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes). It is the first time monoliths “have come to light in Auvergne, and more widely in the centre of France” say INRAP, the French archaeological research body. The standing stones are no longer standing, having been deliberately toppled, presumably in an iconoclastic act related to some religious or cultural dispute in prehistory. They are laid out in a north-south formation, with the largest stones at the top of the slope towards the north. One of the stones is more “sculpted”, and is “largely anthropomorphic”, say the researchers, adding: “This ‘statue’ is the only example [of its kind] known in the Auvergne. It has a rounded head, placed on rough shoulders, and shows two small breasts.” The excavations also revealed the skeleton of a tall man that had been covered by a massive stone. The relationship, if any, with the stones is not known, and there is no available data on it as yet. *Connexion France*, 27 Aug 2019.



CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

242: BARBECUED BRAINIAC

All sciences begin with attempts to define.

Nothing has ever been defined.

Because there is nothing to define.

Darwin wrote *The Origin of Species*.

He was never able to tell what he meant by a 'species'." – Fort, *Books*, p13

To complete my philosophical hat trick, I shall bring on Empedocles, who made Monty Python's Greek Philosophers football team, and who has geographical, ideological, and egotistical affinities with Xenophanes.

Here's his Vlavianos haiku:

It's all for Love that

I'm falling into Etna

To put an end to Strife.

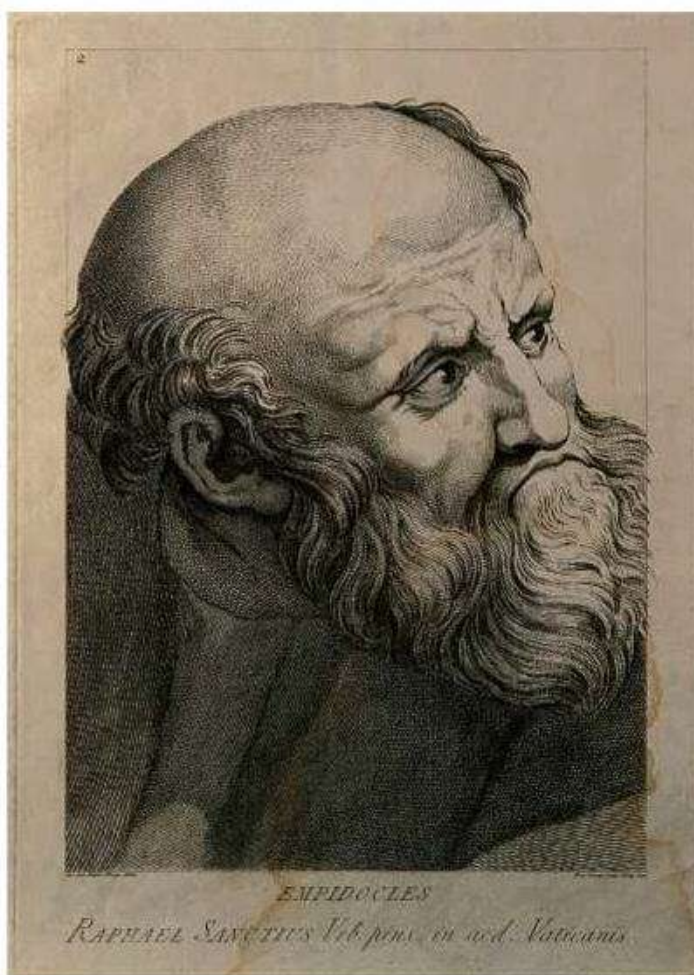
This refers both to his basic cosmogony of the warring opposites which dominate the four elements of Air, Earth, Fire, and Water – and to his spectacular demise, which shall conclude this bird's eye-view. His fiery finale inspired Holderlin's play *The Death of Empedocles* (1800) and Matthew Arnold's epic poem 'Empedocles on Etna' (1852).

Some books and websites dub him 'The Father of Evolution'. That title is better earned by Xenophanes. But his pioneering work in botany, optics and respiration, plus enquiries into human reproduction – why do some mothers have sons, others daughters, and why are there deformed babies and other monsters – God's failures, as Augustine dubbed them? – led him to speculations and connections with evolutionary notions.

In a largely unnoticed remark, Diogenes Laërtius says he credited *Pysche* (Soul – the word also means Butterfly) to all animals and plants. Notions of doggy heaven still attract pet-lovers and animal rights activists, despite being castigated by Thomas Aquinas. The notion that plants have souls should be of interest to Prince Charles who famously talks to his.

The 450 verses of his key poem *On Nature* include 70 found on a papyrus in 1994, now in Strasburg. This is the only case of a pre-Socratic text not relying on quotations from intermediate sources – cf. the online commentary by Patricia Cur. This poem was dedicated to his favourite *eromenos*, Pausanias; thus to adapt one of Samuel Johnson's double paronomasias, it was a work of fundamental importance displaying a bottom of good sense.

Empedocles was certainly the most



conceited of all the Pre-Socratics. Read this extract from his other poem, *Purifications*:

"I, an immortal god, wander among you, honoured by all, adorned with holy diadems and blooming gardens. To whatever illustrious towns I go, I am praised by men and women, and accompanied by thousands, who thirst for deliverance."

Armand Leroi in his admirable *The Lagoon: How Aristotle Invented Science* (2014, p20) has him down to a tee: "Jesus with an ego, Zarathustra with attitude, prancing around Sicily performing miraculous cures to adoring crowds" – sounds like those old Billy Graham rallies.

This ego-trip was bolstered by stories, no doubt circulated by his press agent, that he had calmed violent winds with outstretched donkey-skins – sounds asinine – purified contaminated water that was causing deaths of pregnant women by diverting two rivers to flow in and sweeten it, and confounded rival physicians by raising a woman patient from the dead.

When it came to transmigration of souls, Empedocles outdid even Pythagoras, the maestro of metempsychosis (I did him in **FT272:17**), claiming "Before now I was born both boy and girl, a bush and a dumb

fish leaping out of the sea."

We might flatter the piscine one as alluding to his evolutionary notions of human life beginning in the waters. But what kind of experiences and memories can you have as a bush? Touch of reverse mythology, perhaps? All those girls turned into trees to save them from rape by lustful gods? Or do we have here the origin of the (largely) American 'I'm bushed' or the Australian 'Gone bush'?

Everything about his exit from this world was much disputed. His age was variously put at 60, 79, 109. One story has him hanging himself – most unlikely. Another says he died in bed – too dull. A third has him fall into the sea and drown. *The famous one*, of course, is that he jumped into Mount Etna in order to disappear and be thought a god. This scenario was rather spoiled by the volcano disgorging one of his bronze shoes: as boys, we wore clogs, but wooden ones; nobody rose to metallurgical footwear.

In one of his typically lame verses, Diogenes asked how, if this fiery end was genuine, could guides point out his tomb to tourists at Megara?

Roman poet Horace (*Art of Poetry*, vv465-6) remarked on Empedocles's jump that poets had the right to destroy themselves. Lucian in his dialogue *Icaro-Menippus* seized the chance to laugh that Etna, instead of engulfing him, sent him whirling up to Heaven where, though a bit singed, he lived on, in the Moon, subsisting not on green cheese but dew.

This same Lucian [**FT279:19**] describes how in AD 165 the Christian-turned-Cynic philosopher Peregrines burned himself to death at the Olympic Games with the same Empedoclean motive of trying to pass himself off as divine. All he achieved, gibes Lucian, was an almighty stench.

Various websites report other volcanic suicides, especially at Mt Miara in Japan, a regular last leap, especially for Japanese soldiers, beginning in the 1920s.

Perhaps our man's ego will have been posthumously satisfied by the 2006 naming in his honour of a large underwater volcano off the Sicilian coast?

Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (1945, p60) quotes this squib from an anonymous poet:

Great Empedocles, that ardent soul,
Leapt into Etna, and was roasted whole.

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Anti-vaxxer panics and revelations, plus rare cases of psychotic reactions to certain drugs.

VAXXED OFF [FT377:16-17, 380:26, 384:12-13]



Rumours that a free medical outreach programme in south-east Nigeria was a ruse to forcibly inject schoolchildren with monkeypox or some other deadly virus caused mass hysteria. Pupils fled schools in terror, schools were besieged by furious parents. The south-east region's vaccination rate had hitherto been high, but this episode has damaged trust in the Nigerian military who were conducting the outreach programme as a hearts-and-minds exercise. It is believed that the rumour, rapidly spread via mobile phones and the Internet, was deliberately started by Biafran rebels, building on already-extant mistrust of the army following a recent military campaign in the region, Operation Python Dance II, which resulted in the deaths of numerous civilians.

Meanwhile, a wealthy Manhattan couple have been revealed as significant financiers of the anti-vaccine movement. Over the last seven years, hedge fund manager Bernard Selz and his wife Lisa have contributed over \$3m to anti-vaxxer groups via their Selz Foundation, a philanthropic organisation founded in 1993. It is not known what converted the Selzes to the 'vaccine-hesitancy' cause in 2012, but, since then, they have bankrolled influential antivax groups such as the Informed Consent Action Network (ICAN). They also donated \$200,000 to Andrew Wakefield's legal fund. Wakefield, the English ex-doctor whose 1998 *Lancet* article linking the MMR vaccine with autism is regarded as one of key texts of the antivaxxer movement, with



Wakefield one of its public faces. Although struck off by the General Medical Council for professional misconduct in 2010, Wakefield used some of his defence fund to finance the slickly-produced 2012 film *Vaxxed*, screened at innumerable public events and available free on the Internet.

But it would be wrong to view Wakefield's article as the origin of the antivaxxer movement. In the mid-1970s, there was worldwide controversy about the safety of the DTP (diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis) vaccine. Doctors at London's Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children in London published a report alleging that 36 children had suffered neurological symptoms after receiving DTP immunization. Television documentaries and newspaper reports followed, with decreased vaccination rates and three major whooping cough outbreaks. In the USA, the 1982 documentary *DPT: Vaccination*

Roulette and the 1991 book *A Shot in the Dark* similarly fuelled suspicion. Whilst the Internet (and particularly social media) have fuelled the rise of current 'vaccine-hesitancy', it is not an entirely new phenomenon.

One factor that may have contributed to the rise of vaccine conspiracy theories is the rare but documented phenomenon of unlucky persons who experience psychosis when given yellow fever or malaria vaccines. Psychotic reaction is a highly unusual but recognised risk when taking these medications. The case of Alana Cutland, who jumped from a plane to her death earlier this year [see FT385:80] highlighted the problem; local Madagascan police are investigating whether she was suffering side-effects from an anti-malarial such as Larium.

Malcolm Brabant, a former BBC journalist, recently contacted Ms Cutland's family with his own story. Mr Brabant



LEFT: Wealthy Manhattanites Bernard and Lisa Selz have been bankrolling the anti-vaccination movement.

ABOVE: Journalist Malcolm Brabant believed he was the Messiah, Churchill and the Devil after being vaccinated for yellow fever.

told them that after being given the yellow fever vaccine Stamaril prior to a trip to the Ivory Coast in 2011, he began to experience severe delusions. At first believing himself to be the Messiah with the ability to heal a wheelchair-bound colleague, he then thought he was Sir Winston Churchill and the Devil. The manager of a Madagascar hotel where Alana Cutland stayed described her deteriorating mental state prior to the fatal plane journey; her parents also recall "frantic phone calls" in which they tried to arrange an early flight home. Allowed out of hospital for Christmas, Mr Brabant recalled hearing voices telling him to "kill, kill, kill" as he was about to carve the pork with a knife. He has subsequently researched the phenomenon, and told Alana Cutland's family that young women seem most susceptible. *punchng.com*, 17 Oct 2017; *www.washingtonpost.com*, 19 June 20. *Sunday People*, 4 Aug 2019; <https://www.historyofvaccines.org/content/articles/history-anti-vaccination-movements>.

SEASON'S READINGS

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BACK FROM THE DEAD

An annual parade celebrates Galicia's lucky coffin-dodgers, plus more modern-day Lazaruses...



NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE

ABOVE: People are carried in coffins by relatives during the annual "Procession of the Shrouds" to celebrate Santa Marta de Ribarteme, "the saint of resurrection", in Las Nieves, Spain, on 29 July 2019. **BELOW:** 'Miracle Man' Joao Araujo was pronounced dead but started moving some 20 minutes later. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Trenton McKinley.

• The annual Procession of the Shrouds to celebrate Santa Marta de Ribarteme (Saint Martha), the sister of Lazarus and "the saint of resurrection", happens every year on 29 July. The parade of coffins, following a statue of the saint to the local church, takes place in the small Spanish village of Las Nieves in Galicia. It is meant for people who had near-death experiences that year (or their relatives, who ride in their honour), and to thank the saint for keeping them alive. Some intone the hymn: "Virgin Santa Marta, star of the north, we bring you those who have seen death and survived and stared into her eyes and been spared." The festival, which some believe dates back to the 12th century, includes a firework display and partying that carries on well into the following day. *D.Telegraph*, 30 July 2019.

• Joao Araujo, 38, from Linden, Gloucestershire, was driving his wife to work in April 2009 when his eyes rolled towards the back of his head and his hands clenched the wheel. Paramedics determined the Portuguese man was suffering cardiac arrest and rushed him to Gloucestershire Royal Hospital. After six hours of injections and attempted CPR, he was pronounced dead when no vital signs could be found; but 21 minutes later nurses wheeling him to the morgue noticed he was moving. He remained in a coma for three days and doctors feared he could be left brain damaged because of oxygen starvation – but he was back at work after just three weeks, having been fitted with a cardioverter defibrillator.

There was no precise explanation for his

recovery; it was recorded in his notes as "spontaneous return of circulation". He has since become a postman and has a check-up at the cardiology ward every six months, when the nurses say, "The miracle man is back". *Metro*, *D.Mirror*, 25 Mar 2019.

• Mohammad Furqan, 20, had been unconscious since 21 June 2019, when he was involved in an accident in Lucknow, northern India. On 1 July, after his family told the private Ram Manohar Lohia hospital they no longer had the funds to pay for his care, doctors declared him dead – but the next day his relatives saw him move just as he was about to be buried during a funeral ceremony. He was immediately

returned to hospital and put on a ventilator. *Fox News*, 3 July 2019.

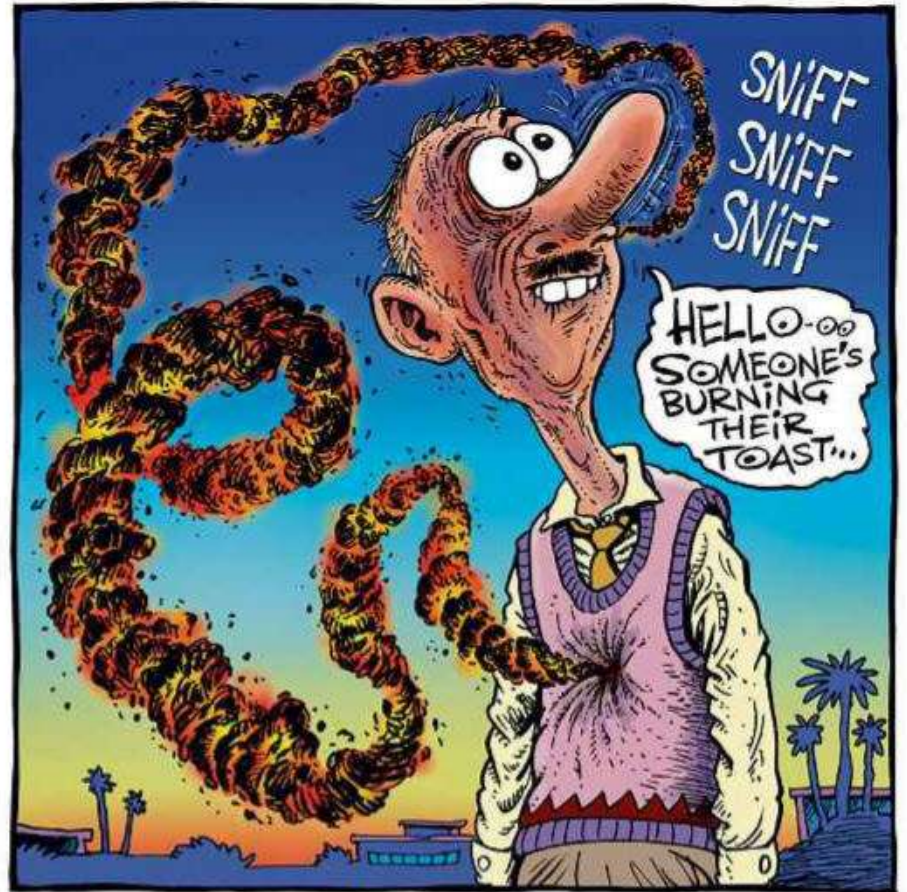
• Henry Mather, 50, from Evanston, Illinois, apparently died at the home of John Brown on 30 July 1890. He had been in poor health following injuries sustained in an accident a few months earlier. A doctor was summoned to confirm the death, and the body was laid out on a bier in the back parlour. Funeral arrangements were made, a death notice sent to the local newspaper and pallbearers selected. Mather's friends gathered in Brown's front parlour to keep vigil. About 3am, a noise was heard coming from the back parlour. William Morgan went to investigate and discovered the 'deceased' sitting up with a lit cigar in one hand and an open bottle of whisky in the other. "What's the matter?"



MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

242: BLUE BLOOD



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

The myth

When a person smells burning toast, and there isn't any toast around, this is a sign of an impending stroke. In some versions of the belief the smell must be of toast; in others, any sort of smoky or burnt odour will do. Sometimes a brain tumour is substituted for the stroke.

The "truth"

Although just about everyone "knows" about toast waftings presaging strokes, the medical authorities are unequivocal: there is no evidence for any connection between the two things. Phantosmia – smelling phantom pongs – can be caused by lots of different conditions, including nasal polyps, allergies, depression, migraine and sinus infections. It's probably worth mentioning to your GP, but its popular association with stroke is a mystery: where did the idea originate? On the subject of self-diagnosis, we have also been cautioned recently, in a campaign by a group of NHS cardiologists, that "chest pain is one of the least common symptoms of a heart attack"

Sources

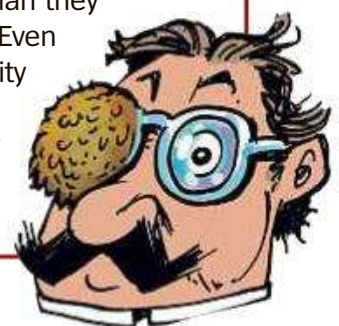
www.healthline.com/health/smelling-burnt-toast; www.nhs.uk/conditions/phantosmia/; www.express.co.uk/life-style/health/713681/is-smell-burnt-toast-rubber-symptoms-of-brain-tumour-or-stroke; www.bfwh.nhs.uk/consultants-heart-month-advice-helps-patients-save-their-own-lives/.

Disclaimer

This column is barely qualified to ride a rocking-horse with L Plates on, let alone offer medical advice. Anyone who knows what they're talking about is invited to contradict and correct via the letters page.

Mythchaser

Amateurs clean their camera lenses far more often than they need to, a reader was told on a photography course. Even a fair covering of dust on a lens won't reduce the clarity of the image. How is this so, she asks, given that the tiniest smudge on my spectacles renders me virtually sightless? Which of the two habits – cleaning or not cleaning – is myth-based?



asked Mather. "Ain't you dead?" queried Morgan. "Why, certainly not, my dear boy," replied Mather. "If you had given me this whisky I would have been all right long ago." (*Queensland Courier-Mail*, 18 May 2019.

- Trenton McKinley, 13, suffered seven skull fractures in March 2018 when he fell from a car trailer that overturned and crushed his head in Mobile, Alabama. He underwent several rounds of surgery, suffering kidney failure and cardiac arrest. Doctors believed he would not recover. His parents were told his organs were a match for five children who needed transplants, and they signed the paperwork. He was declared brain dead the day before his life support was due to be withdrawn – but 15 minutes later his heart resumed beating. By the time of the news report two months later, the teenager was back home, walking and talking, although he needed more surgery to rebuild his skull, and still suffered seizures. He said he believed he was in Heaven while he was unconscious. *D. Telegraph*, 9 May 2018.

For recent round-ups of the "Lazarus phenomenon", see **FT334:10-11, 357:223, 363:12, 381:21.**

- Researchers at the Yale School of Medicine have managed to partially restore brain functioning after death, using the brains of 32 pigs four hours after the animals had been slaughtered. The organs were connected to BrainEx, a system that rhythmically

pumped a solution containing both oxygen and nutrients for the next six hours, mimicking blood flow. The study showed a reduction in brain cell death, restoration of blood vessels, some brain activity such as working synapses, and the same response to medication and consumption of oxygen as would be expected in a living brain. However, an electroencephalogram (EEG) scan revealed no brain-wide electrical activity that might indicate awareness or perception.

The researchers were evidently wary of potential criticism from an ethical point of view; it was made clear that the brains had been harvested from a normal pork industry abattoir and not from animals raised in a lab specifically for the experiment. Furthermore, the Yale scientists were so concerned that the revived and disembodied organs might become conscious that drugs were administered to reduce brain activity, and anæsthetic was on hand in case of any indications of higher brain functioning.

The study is hoped to be of benefit to scientists studying brain functioning in Alzheimer's patients, as well as improving post-stroke treatment and other cases where the brain is starved of oxygen. However, the research does provoke further questions; what, for example, would have happened had the medication to suppress brain activity not been administered? And if the delay between death and commencing the experiment had been less than four hours, might consciousness have been revived? Commenting on the study, Nenad Sestan, a professor of neuroscience at Yale, observed that cell death in the brain occurs over a longer time frame than had previously been thought, "and that some of those processes can be either postponed, preserved or even reversed". *BBC News*, *bigthink.com*, *Yahoo News UK*, 17 Apr 2019. (For early experimentation on the persistence of brain activity in decapitated humans, see **FT368:36-43.**)



BIG CAT BULLETIN | We round up the latest sightings of outsized mystery mogs, including the dramatic appearance of a panther in a French town



ABOVE: The black panther seen roaming the rooftops of Armentières. BELOW: The cat photographed by John Pearson in Yorkshire.

- Following the mauling of a Labrador by an ABC (anomalous/alien big cat) in Harrowbarrow, east Cornwall, on 30 March [FT379:4], and the disappearance of five domestic cats in the village, police took a plaster cast of a 5in (13cm) paw print that the RSPCA confirmed was the pad of a large cat. Becky Abrey filmed an Alsatian-sized cat in a field by Praa Sands near Penzance on 7 April. This is around 75 miles (120km) from Harrowbarrow. In neighbouring Devon, a roe deer was found with its face and throat torn apart near the Grey Wethers stone circles; and gym owner Steve Swatton, 63, saw a large ABC near Plymouth. He said: "It was the same sort of shape as a greyhound but bigger and bulkier. It was about 5ft to 6ft [1.5-1.8m] long, with a tail about 5ft long." He added that at least nine other people had seen it.

There were ABC sightings near Braintree in Essex and in Northamptonshire, while a large black ABC was photographed on a golf course in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. In the second half of April, Lynne Norton came upon a deer carcass stripped of all its flesh in Tehidy Woods near Redruth in Cornwall. Around 10 April, Ed Simpson filmed a Labrador-sized ABC from a first floor window of his

pub, the Fox Inn, in Broadwell, Gloucestershire. At the month's end, Marianne Barton, 64, heard a substantial animal charging through the trees of her orchard in Chalford, near Stroud in Gloucestershire, before it jumped from a wall and rushed past her. She said the black beast leapt 30ft (9m) across the garden in "two or three bounds". *D.Star*, 5 April; *D.Mirror*, 9 April; *Sun*, 6+8+9+10+11 April; *coasttocoastam.com*, 10 April; *cornwalllive.com*, 26 April; *D.Mirror*, 30 April 2019.

- In June, Eric Cormack, of the *Forres Gazette*, photographed a black ABC near Alves, Moray, Scotland, as it bounded across a field about 300 yards away. "You can see the scale of the animal against the fence behind it," he said. "It looked as big as a Labrador with a longer tail." *Forres Gazette*, 26 June 2019.

- In mid-July, dog walker Cass Elbourne, 55, found a deer carcass near her home in Redhill, Surrey. It was stripped of flesh, apart from its head and legs. Two days earlier she had caught sight of a brown ABC in a nearby field. *Sun*, *D.Star*, 17 July 2019.



- At sunrise on 17 August, John Pearson, 46, photographed an ABC at St Aidan's Nature Reserve at Allerton Bywater in Yorkshire. "I was about 200 metres away... The lens was at full stretch, but when I zoomed in I realised it was a cat. Its neck was really chunky and its tail looked like a big cat. I tried to get a bit closer but it walked into the woods. It wasn't running, it was just prowling... I go there most weekends so I'll be on the lookout for it again."

Big cat sightings are not uncommon in the district. A panther-like beast was caught on camera in August 2016 in fields near Crofton. There were also several reported sightings of the 'Beast Of Ossett', which made national headlines in 2000, while another mystery creature was seen in 2009 along a disused railway track between Wintersett and Newmillerdam. *Pontefract and Castleford Express*, *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 23 Aug 2019.

- A black panther found roaming the rooftops of Armentières near Lille in northern France for nearly an hour on the evening of 18 September was cornered and captured by firefighters. A

security cordon was thrown up, and when the cat slipped into the third-storey window of a flat believed to be its home, a veterinary surgeon was called in to tranquillise it. The panther's owner meanwhile is believed to have escaped through the same window. The six-month-old female feline, weighing 25-30kg (55-66lb), was handed over to France's animal protection league and housed in Maubeuge Zoo near the Belgian border; but when keepers arrived for work on 24 September, they found the pen broken open and the panther missing. A week later, the man from whose apartment the cat had escaped presented himself to police for questioning on suspicion of illegally keeping and abusing a wild animal, "notably by cutting its claws", an official said. At the time of writing, the panther had yet to be recovered. [AFP] *scmp.com* (*South China Morning Post*), 19 Sept; [UPI] *BBC News*, 24 Sept; [AFP] 2 Oct 2019.

- On 29 September, Dr Neetu Nirdosh found her son Alexander (4) and daughter Falcon (6) frozen in fear in their garden in Hampstead, north London, as a leopard-spotted ABC snapped at them. "As I ran outside I saw it pulling at Falcon's jumper," she said. "It was taller than my children and was just circling them like it was working them out. Its teeth were showing. I screamed and threw a toy horse at it and pulled the children inside." Rather than running off, the cat attacked the horse – repeatedly sinking its teeth in and shredding it. It eventually slunk off. Expert Frank Tunbridge said it could be a Savannah – a £4,000 designer cross between a domestic cat and a Serval, a large African wild cat. He said: "They look cute as kittens but people soon realise they have a wild cat and dump them because they are unmanageable. They attack domestic cats and dogs and can claw children." The beast was still at large at the time of the news report. *Sun*, 30 Sept 2019.



KARL SHUKER reports on the official recognition of new species of salamander and whale



ABOVE: A Chinese giant salamander. BELOW: Two views of a male *Berardius minimus* carcass found stranded on 10 November 2012 in Sarufutsu, Hokkaido.

RESURRECTED AMPHIBIAN

Traditionally, the world's biggest living species of amphibian has been the Chinese giant salamander *Andrias davidianus*, with a length of up to 5ft 11in (1.8m) and a weight of up to 110lb (50kg). In 2018, however, a major study by researchers from London's Zoological Society and Natural History Museum was conducted on mitochondrial DNA samples taken from 17 historical museum specimens and late 20th century specimens procured throughout its geographical range in the wild (which has decreased dramatically in modern times due to over-harvesting for the luxury food and traditional medicine trades). The study's key findings – published in the scientific journal *Ecology and Evolution* – revealed that this supposed single species could be divided on genetic grounds into at least three discrete groups, each of which may well constitute a valid species in its own right and exist in a separate region of China from the others. Moreover, they all apparently diverged from one another over a million years ago.

Of these differentiated species, one was actually recognised as such back in 1924, based upon a captive specimen living in London Zoo, but of unrecorded precise provenance in the wild. It was given the name *Megalobatrachus* [now *Andrias*] *sligoi*, the South China giant salamander, before it was re-assimilated into *A. davidianus*. However, examination of specimens by the 2018 study (including the 1920s London Zoo individual) supported reinstating it as a legitimate species. In addition, it is this one, *A. sligoi*, that claims the biggest single specimen of Chinese giant

salamander presently on record, captured in the early 1920s near Guiyang in China's Guizhou province. This means that the world's biggest species of salamander now may well no longer be *A. davidianus* but rather *A. sligoi*, resurrected after almost a century of taxonomic anonymity.

www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-49692583 17 Sept 2019; <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ece3.5257> 16 Sept 2019.

CRYPTID COMES OF AGE

The term 'cryptid' was first publicly coined in a letter from Canadian cryptozoological enthusiast John E Wall, published in the summer 1983 issue of the *ISC Newsletter* (produced by the now long-defunct International Society of Cryptozoology). Derived from the Greek for 'hidden', it refers to any scientifically unknown animal of cryptozoological relevance. Yet although swiftly accepted and widely used thereafter by the global cryptozoological community, its formal etymological recognition beyond that community has taken rather longer. Although 'cryptid' had been accepted as a legitimate word by the authoritative Merriam-Webster Dictionary by the end of the 20th century, it has taken until 2019 for this publication to include it officially. M-W defines cryptid as: "An animal (such as Sasquatch or the Loch Ness Monster) that has been claimed to exist but never proven to exist".

Succinct but satisfactory. <https://news.ihart.com/featured/coast-to-coast-am/content/2019-04-23-cryptid-added-to-the-dictionary/> 23 April 2019; www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cryptid

A WHALE OF A DISCOVERY

Whalers working off Hokkaido, northern Japan, have long known that some Japanese specimens of Baird's beaked whale *Berardius bairdii* are much smaller and also much darker than the typical slate-grey, larger variety; but these morphological differences have traditionally been dismissed simply as intraspecific variation of no taxonomic significance.

Recently, however, a comprehensive examination of four such specimens preserved in museums was conducted by a team of Japanese researchers, concentrating on external morphology and skull osteometric data. In a *Science Reports* paper published on 30 August 2019, the team revealed that this quartet of specimens exhibited a substantially smaller body size of physically mature individuals, a proportionately shorter beak, and darker body colour – differences that collectively led the researchers to conclude that the diminutive, entirely black form constituted a valid new species in its own right, taxonomically discrete from *B. bairdii* after all. On account of its characteristic small body size, this new species has been formally named *B. minimus*. www.nature.com/articles/s41598-019-46703-w 30 Aug 2019.



NECROLOG

This month, the self-styled 'King of Hay-on-Wye' turns the final page, while the demise of a colourful and crooked political maverick leaves Belgium a duller place



ABOVE LEFT: Royalty among second-hand booksellers – Richard Booth in Hay-on-Wye. ABOVE RIGHT: Jean-Pierre Van Rossem at a Belgian racing circuit in 1998.

RICHARD BOOTH

This second-hand bookseller styled himself 'King of Hay-on-Wye'. His energy and taste for self-publicity transformed the ailing market town on the Welsh border into a hub for the second-hand book trade that attracts tourists from round the world. Arriving in Hay in 1961, Booth invested money from a legacy in a string of abandoned premises, including a cinema, which he filled with books bought by the lorry-load. (His mother was heir to the Yardley soap fortune.) Travelling the world, he bought up whole libraries. Hay overflowed with volumes in every language on every subject. Journalist Sam Llewellyn recalled being shown 10,000 copies of *HM Ploughing Regulations for Bengal for 1948*. In the early 1980s, Booth outraged bibliophiles by selling books off by the carload for home burning. He furnished books for movie sets and supplied a German town with the manuals to replicate the Wehrmacht's original archive. "The New Book is for the Ego," said Booth; "the Secondhand Book is for the Intellect."

On April Fool's Day 1977, Booth declared Hay independent and had himself crowned King Richard Cœur de Livre

('Bookheart'; *Private Eye* dubbed him 'Bokassa'.) After a coronation ceremony at the town's Norman castle (which he had bought), dressed in a home-made crown and fake ermine robe, he went on a walkabout with his consort, "Duchess of Hay and Offa's Dyke", the transsexual model April Ashley, and appointed his horse Prime Minister. There was a fly-past by a bi-plane of the Hay Air Force and a rowing boat was launched as the first ship of the Hay Navy. The party then adjourned to the pub, where Hay passports and Hay edible rice paper banknotes went on sale and the King dispensed cabinet posts.

The first Hay literary festival took place in 1988. ("Hay-on-Wye?" Arthur Miller inquired when asked to appear early on. "Is that some kind of sandwich?") The King made outspoken attacks on supermarkets, the council, the Welsh Development Board and Tourist Authority, breezeblocks, the despoliation of Cusop Dingle, public lavatories, advertising and weekenders. In 2004 he was appointed MBE for his services to tourism in Powys and in 2014, in association with the Hay Writers' Circle, gave his name to an annual award for

non-fiction. His autobiography, *My Kingdom of Books*, appeared in 1999. He is survived by his third wife, Hope Stuart. *Richard George William Pitt Booth, bookseller and King of Hay-on-Wye, born Plymouth, Devon 12 Sept 1938; died Cusop, Herefordshire 20 Aug 2019, aged 80.*

JEAN-PIERRE VAN ROSSEM

A self-styled financial wizard and Marxist turned anarchist, one-time millionaire owner of Onyx, a Formula One racing team, convicted fraudster, junkie and novelist, Van Rossem is in the running for the most colourful figure in the history of Belgian politics.

In the early 1970s he went to America, where he set up a small company but went bankrupt financing a heroin habit and was sentenced to four years for fraud. He returned to Belgium and in the 1980s set up in business as a stock market guru having, he said, found a formula for predicting and beating market trends and yielding enormous returns. He set up an investment company, Moneytron, the name of a "supercomputer" able to predict economic fluctuations, a machine no one else ever got to see. It was rumoured clients

included Belgian royalty and various heads of state. In 1989 Van Rossem was reported by the other *FT* to have managed \$7 billion from international investors. He amassed a personal fortune variously estimated at between \$500 million and \$860 million. He claimed to own a \$4 million yacht, two Falcon 900 aircraft and 108 Ferraris. A hulking, sweaty 19 stone, with grey straggly hair drooping onto his chest, he was not an attractive figure. Things began to fall apart in 1990 after he wrote a cheque for more than \$50 million to a French entrepreneur, which bounced. He also printed false shares. Moneytron was nothing more than a smoke-and-mirrors Ponzi scheme.

Van Rossem was in jail for fraud when elected to Belgium's parliament in November 1991 for his own libertarian protest party. Under the slogans "No nonsense, vote libertine" and "No whining, everybody rich", he demanded the privatisation of Belgium's social security system, direct elections for police officers and the abolition of the monarchy and marriage. His party got 200,000 votes (3.2 per cent) and won three seats. Van Rossem, who had been sentenced to five years in jail, took his seat in



1992 and remained at liberty until 1995 thanks to parliamentary immunity. As an MP, he published a guide to more than 1,000 Belgian brothels, with Michelin-guide style symbols for good hygiene, comfort, and value for money. “I was a crook and gangster,” he said in 1993. “I don’t believe in paying taxes. The people here must be hopeless to vote for a nutcase like me.” Back in the nick, he wrote a bestselling autobiography.

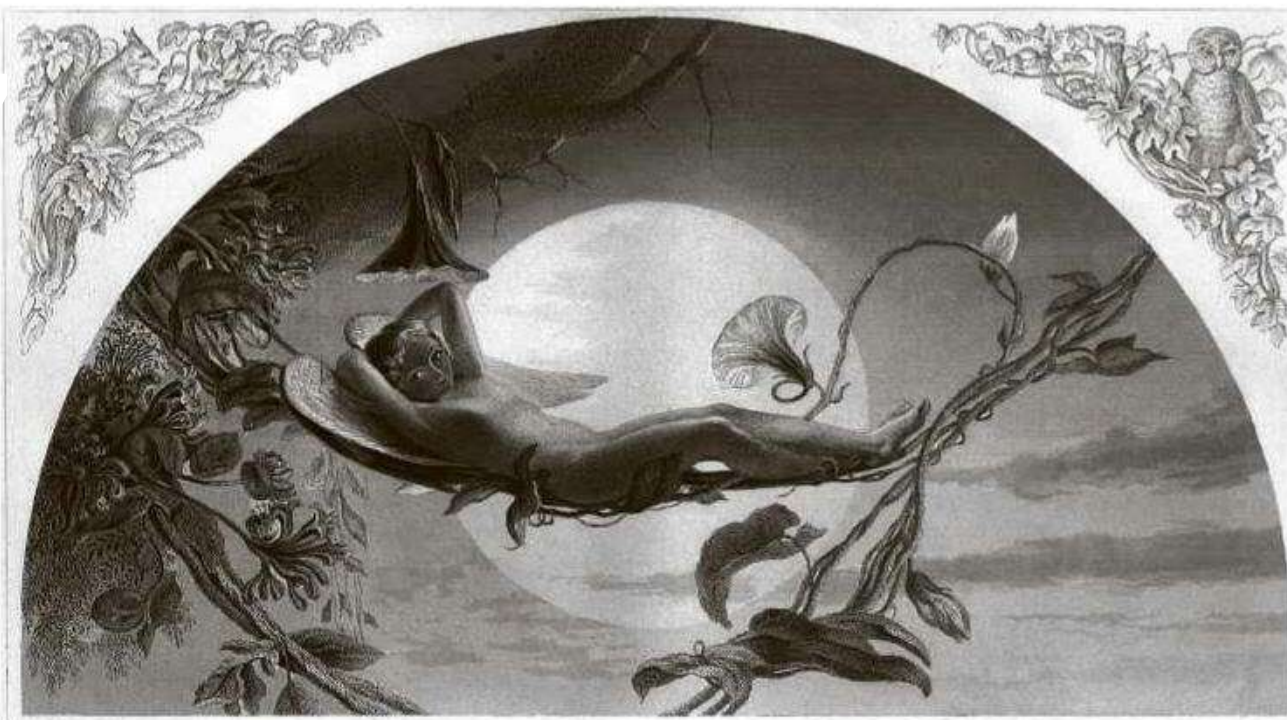
He married three times and had a son. He bought Europe’s first refrigerated coffin to house the body of his second wife, who reportedly committed suicide in 1989 when he met another woman, “so I can see her again before I die”, but was prevented from installing it in the graveyard by the local community, who thought the noise of the motor excessive. Shortly before his death, he was sentenced to a further two years for forgery, money laundering and fraud, and was fined \$390,000.

Jean-Pierre Van Rossem, Belgian maverick, born Bruges 29 May 1945; died 14 Dec 2018, aged 73.

RUSS GIBB

In October 1969, Russ Gibb was hosting his show on the Detroit music station WKNR-FM when a listener called in to relate a rumour sweeping college campuses that Paul McCartney had died and been replaced by a lookalike (see Dean Ballinger’s feature, **FT384:30-37**). Gibb and his co-host spent an hour discussing the rumour, after which it spread worldwide: Paul had been killed in a car crash on the M1 after he had had a row with his bandmates and driven off in anger. An orphan from Edinburgh, ‘William Campbell’, had been drafted in and trained up by MI5 to impersonate McCartney – or as he was called ‘William Shears Campbell’, shortened to Billie Shears, a name that featured on the title track of *Sgt Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

Russ Gibb, disc jockey, born Dearborn, Michigan 15 June 1931; died 30 April 2019, aged 87.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

BOGGART MEMORIES

The boggart is one of the most mysterious of all British bogies. It is often written up in modern folklore works as a tetchy brownie, stealing socks and spoiling milk. Others describe, instead, something darker and more reptilian dwelling in abandoned houses and in marshes at the edges of communities. The sliminess of the boggart is a recurrent theme, perhaps because of the first syllable of its name. But how much of this reflects community traditions about boggarts in the north of England, rather than hand-me-downs from fantasy fiction (Juliana Horatio Ewing, Susan Cooper, *Harry Potter*, *Spiderwick* etc)?

Earlier this year, *FT* readers helped me kick off a boggart census, to discover what those born between 1920 and 1970 remembered about boggarts and boggart lore. The census went far, far better than I had imagined possible. I have been able to gather in, thanks to *FT* and other forms of traditional and digital media, just over 1,000 boggart memories. These will soon be published online in a single, free pdf. Some memories come from the boggart heartlands, places like Blackley, New Mills and Clitheroe. I also turned up boggarts, though, in Shropshire, Kent and (say it quietly) Zimbabwe. Most of the memories were about folklore rather than forteana. The way, for instance, that ‘boggart’

was used in day-to-day language; the boggarts employed to scare kids into good behaviour in pre-war Lancashire; or the teddy bear treacle miners of Sabden, bought by so many children in the 1970s. However, I was pleasantly surprised to find descriptions of encounters, too: *not stories but experiences*. There were the boys who escaped the Towneley Boggart in

a snowed-up Burnley park. The cat-like boggarts who harassed folk in the Fylde, including a cat boggart who jumped on a girl’s back. The ball-of-light boggart spotted by two young men in Derbyshire. The devil boggart behind a hedge who terrified a worker into jumping off a moving land rover. The dwarf boggarts in black at Blackpool airport. The half-fly boggart who pursued a woman. The green boggart who was spotted in a tree next to a boggart house...

A boggart apparently can be a bluebottle, a flame ball, a demon, a gremlin in a tree and pretty much anything else it wants to be. Welcome to the glorious plasmatic anarchy of the impossible! The reptilian house orc of modern folklore tomes is misleading and should be junked. It goes without saying that I am incredibly grateful to all those who contributed from the *FT* family. By the time you read this you should have your boggart picture through the post. If not, send me a furious email!

Simon Young’s new book *Magical Folk: British and Irish Fairies* is out now from Gibson Square.

THERE WERE
THE BOYS WHO
ESCAPED THE
TOWNELEY
BOGGART IN A
SNOWED-UP
BURNLEY PARK



Scramble, UFO!

JENNY RANGLES wonders why a pilot's UFO encounter from 1956 was covered up by the MoD

Perhaps the biggest UFO story of recent times has been the revelation from US military personnel of their close encounter off southern California on 14 November 2004 (see updates of this case by Peter Brookesmith in **FT363:28**, **380:32** & **381:28**).

Pilots and shipboard radar tracked objects doing what no known aircraft could emulate and camera footage from military jets seemingly affirmed this. Claims suggest the radar data was hastily removed from the fleet involved in the Pacific exercise off San Diego.

One interesting revelation from this complex case is that the object was not called a UFO by Washington but termed a 'UAP'. This acronym has also been used by the UK government since at least the 1970s, although not in communications with the public, where UFO persisted.

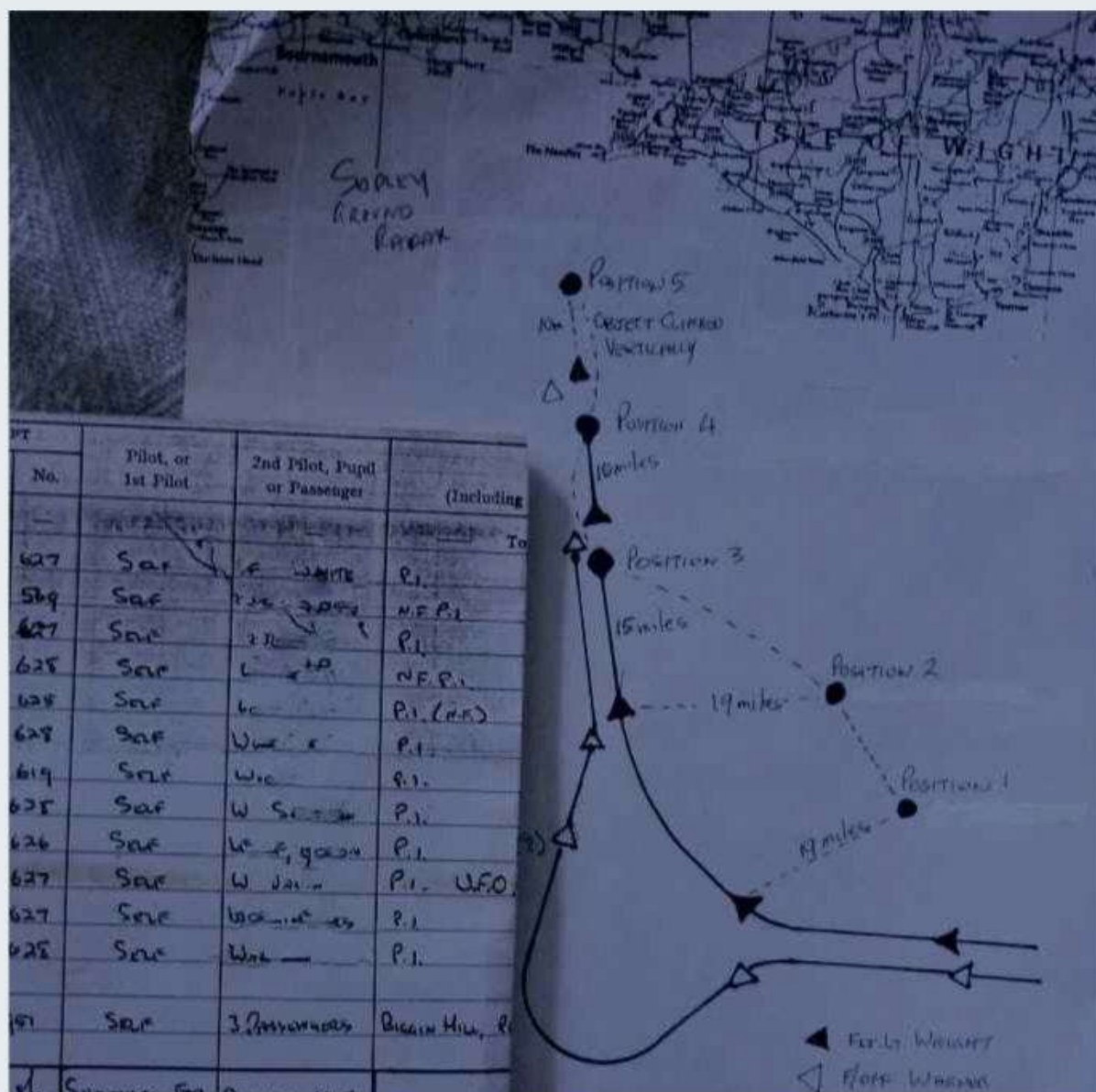
UAP, unidentified aerial phenomena (or 'atmospheric' as I myself prefer), is what UK researchers began calling unsolved cases 40 years ago. But have any British military encounters with UAP been recorded? In this series of reports I want to consider that question.

One element of the argument surrounding the above case, in which the US Navy was testing new electronic equipment, is who studied the retrieved data and why? Is there a covert UAP investigation unit seeking foreign spy tech or some natural phenomenon that might be tamed to create a weapon?

For many years I have suspected the latter as the most likely reason why MoD interest in UFO activity has survived despite no real evidence of an 'alien invasion' and a public perception that little green men are synonymous with UFOs.

Some evidence suggests that Farnborough in Hampshire – the home of aviation technology research after World War II and still a world-renowned showcase for the latest work in this field – seems to have had an interest in 'Flying Saucer' reports over 60 years ago; but we know little about what that interest and subsequent study entailed.

The MoD release of the (heavily redacted) Condon report carried out just before the turn of the century (see David Clarke's account in **FT368:26-29**) shows that investigation into UAP was happening in the UK around the time when the incident involving the US fleet occurred. Reputedly,



ABOVE: The logbook of RAF pilot EH 'Wilbur' Wright and his map of the 1956 UFO intercept.

this has since closed down, but it seems reasonable to assume that something of a similar nature is ongoing. It is unimaginable that rogue data reported by aircrew or radar are not assessed by scientists and military staff, even if such data are quite rightly not debated openly when the cause underlying them is unknown.

So what do we know about the fate of reports filed with the Air Ministry (MoD) in the 1950s by military witnesses?

In 1991, I was contacted by then retired RAF night fighter pilot EH 'Wilbur' Wright. He had read one of my books and asked for my help to explain what happened during a sighting made by himself and a second pilot and navigators in both planes. This involved a daylight encounter near the Isle of Wight on 30 August 1956. His requests to the MoD had got him nowhere.

This case came just two weeks after the famous Lakenheath/Bentwaters episode – unsolved by the Condon Report that advised closure of the official USAF UFO

project, Blue Book, in 1969. The Suffolk incident was effectively covered up by the MoD in 1956, but involved USAF personnel who assumed the need to brief the government-funded Condon team 10 years later. In 1983, I visited the project's home in Boulder, Colorado, with Dr J Allen Hynek, the consultant to Blue Book, to hear what the scientists thought.

It would appear that secrecy over Lakenheath had a role in the aftermath of the Isle of Wight event days later, especially as these four RAF witnesses were part of the 46th Squadron at RAF Odiham in Hampshire; in 1956, this was home to then brand new Javelin fighters, the first delta-winged jet aircraft to enter service. This was a significant news story; indeed, a Pathé News report made just before the UFO sighting is viewable online and covers this exciting innovation and other new tech at Odiham.

So, just as with the US fleet in 2004, this UFO incident from 48 years earlier

involved early testing of state-of-the-art military tech. Any UFO sighting during that programme would – we are bound to assume – be subject to considerable scrutiny. After all, nobody knew who might be observing the tests at close quarters, particularly so soon after Lakenheath.

Ralph Noyes, a former MoD department head involved in UFO investigation from the early 1950s, came out in support of UFOs in 1983 following the Rendlesham Forest case appearing in the media. I had many extraordinary conversations with him over the next 14 years. Tellingly, he agreed with me that UAP existed and could be a rare form of natural energy that might potentially be harnessed as a weapon (he later wrote a curious novel, *A Secret Property*, which develops some thoughts on the international power dynamics of this; see **FT364:31**).

Noyes was explicit about the impact of the August 1956 events at Lakenheath. He told me the Ministry had been abuzz and were desperate to keep the events out of the media spotlight. On taking over as head of MoD UFO study in the late 1960s he saw gun camera footage obtained from an RAF aircraft vectored onto a UFO and, though the film was fuzzy, Noyes described it as intriguing. He understood it to have been taken in August 1956 and assumed it involved Lakenheath, but he was unaware that another incident had taken place that same month until I told him what had been reported to me by ‘Wilbur’ Wright. I suspect there are other incidents from the time that we have no knowledge of.

That gun camera footage has ‘disappeared’, and is presumed lost (see **FT305:72, 307:68-69**). Wright says his Javelin gun camera was not operating, as they were not ready to test that feature of the brand new jet at the time. But the Javelin testing was dangerous – indeed, two crewmen were killed at Odiham flying one of them on a night test a few weeks before Wright’s encounter.

So what did he and the other three crewmembers witness? They were aboard two Javelins just weeks old. Wright was piloting XA 627. With him was his navigator. His logbook for that week shows he made three flights that day, one more in XA 627, and another in XA 626. Throughout August he flew dozens such flights.

Wright explained what happened as they



LEFT: Gloster Javelin XA627, the aircraft piloted by ‘Wilbur’ Wright. **BELOW:** Former MoD department head Ralph Noyes.

The two Javelins now “banked steeply and object was at 15 miles [24km] dead ahead on radar screen, slightly larger visual size. At full power [Javelins had rarely exceeded sound barrier in earlier tests] distance was closed to 10 miles [17km] on radar and object was of metallic



were vectored to practise intercepts at 45,000ft (13,700m):

“Weather was clear above low layers of cloud. Visibility unlimited. We were flying west (over the English Channel south of the Isle of Wight). In line astern before separating for interception. (Second pilot W) was the target aircraft.

“Each turned 45 deg different directions, flying courses at 90 degrees to each other. Airborne radar used with range 20+ miles [32+ km] and height indication. Wright, flying NW before turning SW for interception saw disc shaped object. Off starboard wingtip, ahead. Navigator obtained a radar return at 19 miles [30km]. At this point Wright got estimation of object’s size – diameter of little finger nail at arms length in cockpit. Later calculation indicated a diameter of 600ft [183m].”

They got permission from Ground Control to abandon the test exercise and “investigate object”. The report continues:

“Wright turned north towards the object on right wing – but it apparently slowed down and maintained position. [The second Javelin pilot] had now caught up from behind, half a mile, also confirmed visual and air radar sightings.”

grey appearance.”

In seconds they were “at 8 miles [13km] (when) the object suddenly climbed vertically too fast for air radar to track – estimated rate of climb five miles [8km] per second – and vanished.”

That speed far exceeds known technology in 1956. On landing and debriefing, the crew were told that ground radar at Sopley had tracked the object and confirmed the report. They were understandably ordered not to speak of the events and to submit their report to the Air Ministry. The question ‘Wilbur’ Wright now asked me was: what happened next? Nobody told them and despite extensive searches no file has been traced. But Wright’s logbook did survive.

A researcher into RAF files at the Public Records Office told me her extensive investigations into the 1956 Odiham data (only declassified in 1992) had also proved oddly frustrating. She found multiple facts supporting the testimony of the four men, photos of Wright in a Javelin with the squadron leader during testing, records of their other activity, medals awarded, visits they recalled from dignitaries – but nothing concerning this dramatic incident.

“I am afraid there is no report in the F 540 operational record book of the sighting... I am surprised... it is in his log book.” She told me.

I checked weather data on her advice, as base reports refer to “freak weather” that week. It was unusual for August, with severe thunderstorms north of Odiham that day, but the flight was in a pocket of clear air south of that activity.

So why did these four front line pilots get no answer from wherever this now missing report was sent or its investigation carried out? Some Javelin testing had occurred at Farnborough before the new aircraft entered service at Odiham and, as you will see next month, that may prove to be relevant – because evidence suggests that a UFO investigation was also occurring there...

THE BIRTH OF THE EGYPTIAN GOTHIC

As Tutankhamun returns to London in a major new exhibition, **MARIA J PÉREZ CUERVO** traces the West's fascination with Ancient Egypt and the emergence of an exotic fantasy blending Empire and eroticism, dark mysteries and dangerous magic...

The first wave of Egyptomania swept Britain in 1801. Napoleon had just surrendered Egypt to the British, and the treasures ransacked by the French – including the Rosetta stone, the key to translating hieroglyphic script – were confiscated by the men of King George III and deposited in the British Museum. Egypt became fashionable, inspiring architectural styles, jewellery, and clothing. But, towards the end of the 19th century, the Egypt that the British imagined became distinctively dark, a land of death rituals, dangerous magic, vengeful mummies, and a past that irrupts into the present. When Lord Carnarvon died in 1923, shortly after entering the tomb of Tutankhamun, the press quickly attributed it to the curse of the mummy he and Howard Carter had just discovered. The narrative seemed to take on a life of its own, proving how deeply ingrained this dark, magical view of Egypt was. But how – and why – did the country of the pharaohs become associated with the Gothic?

DEATH AS SPECTACLE

On 1 May 1821, those who entered the Egyptian Hall, an exhibition building in London's Piccadilly, found a doorway to another world. They walked down a dark and narrow staircase into the dimly lit chambers of an Egyptian tomb. Dozens of antiquities and two real Egyptian mummies, one of them unwrapped, awaited them. One step away from the busy streets of London, they found the replica of the tomb of Seti I, discovered in October 1817 in the Valley of the Kings by a remarkable Italian named Giovanni Battista Belzoni (1778-1824).

Until then, visiting the tomb of a pharaoh was an experience restricted to those who



LEFT: A drawing by Giovanni Battista Belzoni (seen below) shows the transportation of the colossal bust of Ramesses II. **FACING PAGE:** The eroticism of unwrapping made explicit in an illustration for Gautier's *Romance of a Mummy*.

The country was presented as haunted by an ancient past

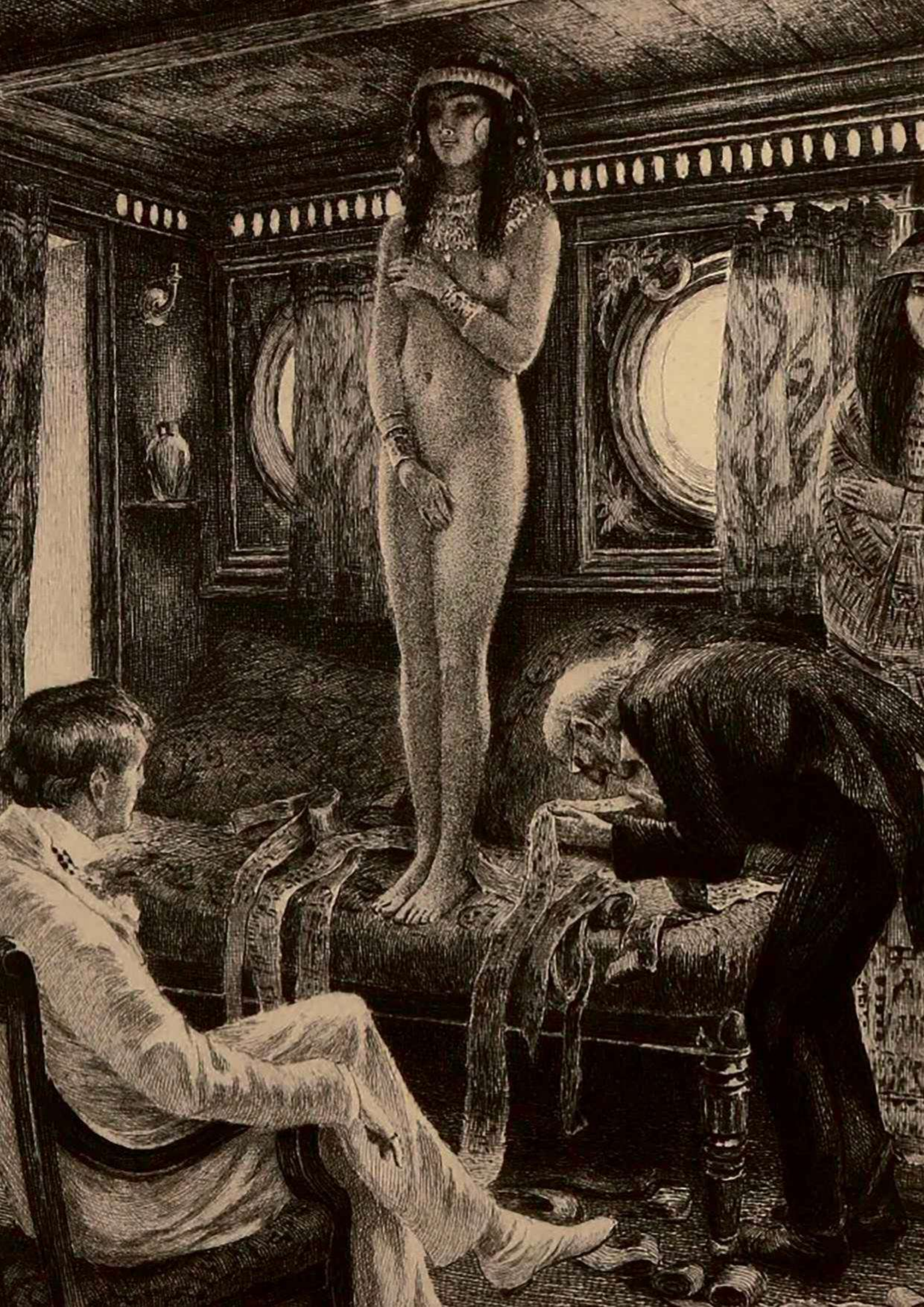


had the means to travel, but this exhibition delivered these thrills to a wider audience. The show was open for almost a year. It was a sensation, creating the kind of impact on visitors that couldn't be matched by a mere travel book. Egypt was seen as a place of exoticism and

wonder; but here, the awe-inspiring was mixed with something else. The country was presented as mysterious and alluring, haunted by an ancient past, defined by its death rituals and beliefs about an afterlife. This was the vision of a man who knew about show business: Belzoni, the adventurer who became famous for his Egyptian travels, was once known as "The Great Belzoni", the circus strongman who could lift 12 men on a platform.

The Italian had arrived in the country of the pharaohs in 1815, after Muhammad Ali Pasha came to power, opening Egypt up to foreign visitors. Initially, Belzoni was hoping to find work as a hydraulic engineer, but he ended up embarking on an extraordinary feat: to remove the colossal sculpture of the head of Ramesses II in Thebes and ship it to England, following the orders of British Consul Henry Salt. The stunt earned him fame, but not the respect of the British cultural elite, who couldn't see past his circus background. He wasn't a rich man, so he had to find ways of profiting from his adventures: he published a narrative of his travels and focused his energies on putting together the show at the Egyptian Hall.

Shortly before the opening of the exhibition, Belzoni organised a publicity





ABOVE: A view of the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, in 1815. **BELOW:** Thomas 'Mummy' Pettigrew, whose live unwrappings of mummies became popular spectacles.

stunt that would have great repercussions: he invited several medical men to the unwrapping of one of his mummies. Among these professionals was Thomas Pettigrew, the son of a naval surgeon who had been practising medicine since he was 16. The procedure captivated him so much that soon afterwards he purchased a mummy to unroll in the privacy of his home. Mummy autopsies weren't new – some had already been performed in the 17th and 18th centuries – but they became synonymous with Pettigrew's name because it was he who turned them into a spectacle. By the 1830s, he was conducting his own public unwrappings. They often started with a talk about the process of mummification before the unwrapping, which wasn't a simple process: much like an autopsy, it was dirty, and required the use of saws, crowbars, and considerable physical strength. In front of a rapt audience, Pettigrew pushed and pulled, using levers to lift the bandages from the body, sawing off parts of the skull to show the cavernous void inside it, proof of the skill of the embalmers. That these were human remains and that, in undoing the mummification process, he was contravening the deceased's wishes – and denying them the possibility of an afterlife, since the Egyptians believed bodies had to remain intact to guarantee the resurrection of the soul – didn't seem to bother him: he regarded what he was doing as science.¹

In spite of their gruesomeness (or perhaps because of it), mummy

Gautier wanted to witness a real mummy unwrapping



unwrappings became hugely popular events, held in public spaces, such as the lecture hall of Charing Cross Hospital, or the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons. The demand was so high that Pettigrew also conducted private events for the social elite, where the spectators were handed fragments of the wrappings and the amulets and personal objects found within them. There were some critical voices, which deemed the spectacle macabre, but there were no fears of supernatural retribution. Mummy unwrappings, however, did inspire a certain type of mummy fiction.

In 1867, the mummy of a woman named Neskonsu was unwrapped by Auguste Mariette at the Exposition Universelle in Paris. Among the attendees was French author Théophile Gautier, who wanted to witness a real unwrapping, as he'd written a similar scene in his novel *Romance of a Mummy* (1858). Like the novel and his short story, *The Mummy's Foot*, his notes about Neskonsu capture the intertwining of love and death that defines mummy romance stories, where an occidental man falls in love with an alluring Egyptian princess.

In these notes Gautier refers to Poe, and the paragraphs that follow certainly seem in line with the American author's obsession with dead maidens. There is an inescapable carnality in his words: as the mummy is being unrolled, Gautier writes of the "faint, delicate odour of balsam, incense, and other aromatic drugs" spreading through the room. There is a storm outside, and he

compares the scene to a waltz, with thunder providing the musical accompaniment as “she pirouetted in the impatient hands of those who were unwrapping her”. But Neskhonsu is being undressed, and it seems that Gautier is trembling with anticipation: progressively, her “slender” form is revealed; her neck emerges first, then, two flowers delicately placed under each armpit, and a berry. When her face is finally revealed, however, he is shaken as “white eyes with great black pupils” – the enamelled eyes that were often inserted in mummies – “shone with fictitious life between brown eyelids... The clear, fixed glance, gazing out of the dead face, produced a terrifying effect.” Her nose had been turned down “to conceal the incision through which the brain had been drawn from the skull.” She is, after all, a corpse. His verdict is clear: she was “less pretty than Tahoser”, the dream mummy he’d conjured up for his *Romance*.

Given the popularity that mummy romance stories enjoyed in the second half of the 19th century, it would seem that Gautier wasn’t the only gentleman who felt oddly aroused by the process of unwrapping a female mummy. But the French author

also notes that Neskhonsu had been mummified so her soul would be “reunited to its well-preserved body, and enjoy supreme felicity”. He was, of course, aware that the unwrapping was a violation of her final wish, a desecration, a kind of rape, for which he, a mere voyeur, doesn’t claim any responsibility. The occult revival of the late 19th century would bring a renewed interest in Egyptian magic and religion, and contemporary literary works would express a fascination with such desecration and its possible consequences.

THE VEIL OF ISIS

While Egyptian tombs continued to be excavated, the tensions created by the British colonial policy in Egypt, increased since the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, exploded in the Anglo-Egyptian war of 1882, creating a climate of imperial anxieties at the end of the 19th century.

At the same time, Britain was gripped by an occult revival. Over the course of a decade, three hugely influential groups were established: the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society (1878), the Society for Psychical Research (1882), and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (1888).

In 1877, Madame Blavatsky, who co-founded the Theosophical Society, had published *Isis Unveiled* (1877), which she named after an ancient motif recorded by Greek philosopher Plutarch in his essay *On Isis and Osiris* (1st-2nd century AD): the seated statue of the veiled goddess in the Egyptian city of Saïs bearing the inscription “I am all that has been and is and shall be, and no mortal has ever lifted my veil”. Blavatsky believed that many ancient cultures had access to an initiatic wisdom, which she called the “Secret Doctrine”, and that it had been preserved in “the rituals and dogmas” of the Egyptian priests, among others.

Like the Freemasons before them, the newly founded Golden Dawn also claimed to have access to ancient Egyptian knowledge. The order’s temples bore Egyptian names (the Isis-Urania in London, the Osiris in Weston-super-Mare, the Horus in Bradford), and its high ranks wore pharaonic garb, and employed symbols such as the ankh of Thoth or the Isis wand. An account by occultist Israel Regardie claims that a “neophyte ceremony” from the Golden Dawn emulated the ritual of the “weighing of the soul” in the Hall of Maat, taken from chapter 125 of the newly translated *Book of the Dead*.



ABOVE: ‘Examination of a mummy – a Priestess of Amun’, by Paul Philippoteaux, c.1891 depicts the unwrapping of the mummy of Ta-Uza-Ra.



ABOVE LEFT: The first Egyptian room in the British Museum in an illustration from 1847. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Visitors to the Museum admire monumental Egyptian statuary in an engraving of 1844. **BELOW:** Aleister Crowley raids the Golden Dawn dressing-up box and emerges in full Ancient Egyptian garb.

The volume, a compilation of ancient Egyptian religious texts, was first published in English in 1867, translated by Samuel Birch, Keeper of the Department of Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum (the most celebrated version would be produced by his successor in the role, Sir Ernest Wallis Budge, in 1895). Victorian occultists became entranced with this world of mystery, curses and charms, with its detailed instructions on how to cross to the other side and go through the trials in the otherworld, and it seems that the Golden Dawn's ceremonial magic was heavily influenced by it.

Later, the order's most infamous member, Aleister Crowley, went on to found his own religion, Thelema, and based its theoretical foundations on several revelations he attributed to the Egyptian god Horus. The falcon-headed god, he explained, manifested twice; once, while he was honeymooning in Egypt, and later, upon one of his visits to the British Museum.

The line that separated academic study from magic and the occult was very thin: scholarly figures frequented occult circles, and esotericists attended conferences and studied Egyptology to invest themselves with an aura of authority. But it was the "imaginary Egypt viewed as the profound source of esoteric lore", in Eric Hornung's words – what he considered the realm of Egyptosophy, as opposed to scholarly Egyptology – that conquered the public imagination and became a central part of the Egyptian Gothic. The question behind many fictional works seemed to be: if the ancient Egyptians knew so much about magic, wouldn't they use it against those who wronged them?

"Believers in Osiris never regard mummies as wholly dead"



HAUNTED MUSEUMS AND CURSED MUMMIES

The British Museum was a popular destination for occultists, esotericists, and spiritualists, who studied documents in the Reading Room and sought spiritual revelations in the Egyptian Rooms, where they sometimes performed psychic readings. But no artefact provoked the fascination of a mummy, uncannily lifelike, quietly staring at us through the centuries. As Wallis Budge said, "believers in Osiris never regard mummies as wholly dead objects": they seem to be suspended in a liminal space. The occult revival had brought an awareness of all things spiritual, and an interest in Egyptian magic and religion. Mummies were no longer seen as mere curiosities or objects to dissect: they were human remains, and remnants of that world of magic – and as such, they might possess some sort of magic themselves.

Even though there are virtually no curses inscribed on the walls of Egyptian tombs – Egyptologist Charlotte Booth lists only three – stories and rumours about them were already circulating in England in the 1880s, four decades before the discovery of Tutankhamun, as Roger Luckhurst describes in his book *The Mummy's Curse*.

The most famous tale was probably that of acquisition 22542, or, as it is still listed on the British Museum website, the Unlucky Mummy. It's a misleading nickname, as it isn't a mummy but a coffin lid decorated with the image of a woman identified as a priestess of Amen-Ra. It was acquired by Oxford-educated gentleman Thomas Douglas Murray and a group of friends who travelled in Egypt in the 1860s, although it

MUMMY DEAREST: THE EVOLUTION OF EGYPTIAN GOTHIC FICTION

Egyptian Gothic fiction reached its peak in the late 19th century with tales of vengeful mummies, but mummy stories don't all follow the same pattern. Some present the mummy as an erotic fantasy; some use it as a tool to satirise contemporary society; and some are driven by an irruption of the past, in the traditional Gothic style. Within the latter group, the mummy can be presented as violent and repulsive, an embodiment of the colonial Other, which often exerts a powerful domination over the Western protagonists in what Professor Stephen Arata has labelled 'reverse colonisation'. Among the most interesting examples, however, are those that can be seen as critiques of colonial power, and those that equate some archaeological practices of the time with tomb raiding, desecration or even rape.

THE MUMMY! OR A TALE FROM THE TWENTY-SECOND CENTURY (JANE WEBB, 1827)

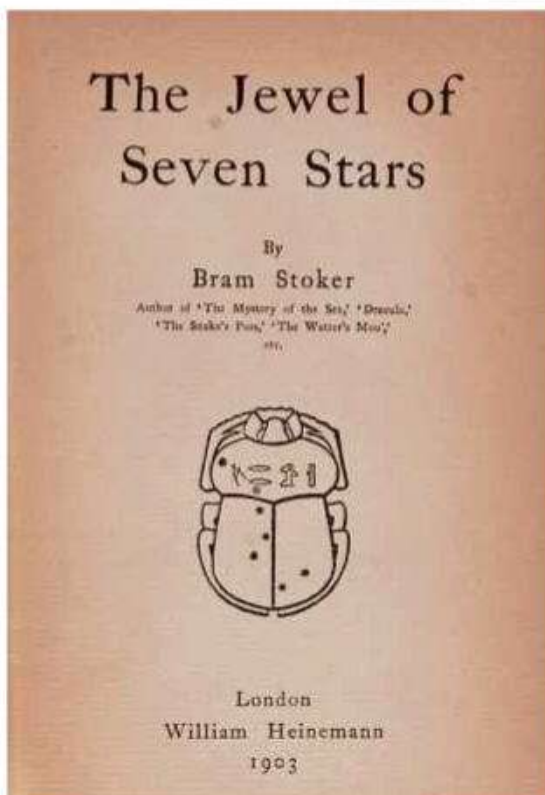
The first mummy story was written by a teenage girl, Birmingham-born Jane Webb (later Jane C Loudon) after she became an orphan at 17, and it drew inspiration from the famous creation of another teenage girl, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Like the Creature, this mummy is revived through galvanic shock, but, whereas the story has its Gothic moments, its purpose is satirical: the mummy appears in the London of 2126 and adopts the role of an advisor.

THE MUMMY'S FOOT (THÉOPHILE GAUTIER, 1840)

In this seminal mummy romance story, a man buys a mummy's foot that had belonged to an Egyptian princess. She manifests in front of him, he returns her mummified foot, and they both travel to Egypt, where, fascinated by her exoticism, he asks her father for her hand. To his chagrin, he is woken by his servant. Gautier would return to this territory in his novel *The Romance of a Mummy* (1863).

LOST IN A PYRAMID, OR, THE MUMMY'S CURSE (LOUISA MAY ALCOTT, 1869)

Best known as the author of *Little Women*, Alcott also wrote what is considered the first mummy's curse story. The mummy of a sorceress carries out her revenge through the ancient seeds of a plant that are found in her tomb and that poison those who grow them. The text is an oblique critique of British colonialism, and feminist readings have noted the parallels between the desecration of a tomb and a rape: the mummified sorceress refuses to be a passive figure, a commodified object, and invites us to witness her revenge.



LOT NO. 249 (ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, 1892)

A young Egyptologist who dabbles in the Black Arts brings a mummy back to life to use as his henchman. For the first time, a revenant-mummy is presented as sinister, menacing, and able to perform violent acts, an idea that would become a staple in pulp fiction and cinema. Doyle loathed Egypt, which he regarded as "contemptible" and "emasculated", so the mummy doesn't even have a name – just the lot number of the title – or a backstory, and is described as a "horrid, black, withered thing" reanimated with "filthy Egyptian tricks".

THE BEETLE (RICHARD MARSH, 1897)

The novel that outsold *Dracula* in its year of publication, now largely forgotten, presents a shape-shifting Egyptian entity seeking revenge against a British politician. The monster is an enormous beetle that sucks its victims dry, effectively mummifying them (scarabs, of course, were an ancient Egyptian symbol of eternal life). Suffocating, with an undeniable psychosexual charge, the book uses the motif of mesmerism to convey the allure of this gender-fluid creature and the horror it inspires.

PHAROS, THE EGYPTIAN (GUY BOOTHBY, 1898)

Pharos, an enigmatic Egyptian, seeks to punish Forrester, the son of an Egyptologist, who has inherited the mummy of Ptahmes, head sorcerer of the king. Pharos turns out to be the reincarnation of Ptahmes: "Your father stole me from the land of my birth," he warns Forrester, "and from the resting place the gods decreed for me; but beware, for retribution is pursuing you, and is even now close upon your heels." Pharos's powers are certainly impressive: soon, London is overtaken by a plague in a scene reminiscent of *Dracula*, published only the previous year. Like Stoker's novel, Boothby's is constructed on the fear of the monstrous foreigner.

THE JEWEL OF SEVEN STARS (BRAM STOKER, 1903)

Inspired by Howard Carter's discovery of the tomb of Queen Hatshepsut in 1902, this was hailed as Stoker's finest novel since *Dracula*. The mummy of the Egyptian Queen Tera is transported to England and kept in a cave by the sea in Cornwall, where she is to be raised from the dead. Stoker uses a contemporary discovery as a plot device, mixing science and the occult: the magic from ancient Egypt turns out to be "dark matter", or radioactivity. The ending was deemed too disturbing, so Stoker rewrote it with fewer deaths.



ABOVE: The “Unlucky Mummy”, seen displayed at a British Museum press conference, was rumoured to have been aboard the *Titanic* on its ill-fated voyage.
BELOW: Another supposedly cursed mummy was bought by Walter Ingram in 1885; three years later he was trampled to death by an elephant.

wouldn't make headlines until 1904. Shortly after purchasing it, Murray lost an arm in a shooting accident. From then on, all sorts of calamities were blamed on the artefact: the various misfortunes of Murray's immediate circle or the injuries its owners suffered when it was displayed in their homes. Attempts to photograph it revealed what was interpreted as a malignant presence. Apparently, even Madame Blavatsky warned against its evil influence. After passing from hand to hand, it was finally sold to the British Museum in 1889, where it joined the other artefacts in the Egyptian Rooms.

In 1904, Fletcher Robinson, journalist and editor of the *Daily Express* and close friend of Arthur Conan Doyle, wrote a piece about the Unlucky Mummy that prompted many alarmed letters to Wallis Budge, then Keeper of Egyptian Antiquities, and panicked the Museum's visitors, many of whom refused to go anywhere near the coffin lid. Three years later, Robinson died of typhoid fever. Predictably, he was also presumed to be a victim of the curse: “Typhoid fever,” said Conan Doyle, who claimed to have warned him of meddling with the artefact, “is the way in which elementals guarding the mummy might act.”

The story of the Unlucky Mummy encapsulates the height of Imperial Gothic anxiety: the fear of otherworldly revenge from the colonial Other due to the desecration of tombs and the appropriation of artefacts from other cultures. And, as no other museum epitomised the operations of Empire quite as the British Museum did, it made sense that its Egyptian Rooms were believed by some people to be extremely haunted.

Even though Murray had parted with the Unlucky Mummy, he remained morbidly



fascinated by it. He visited the Egyptian Rooms with his friend, the newspaper editor, spiritualist, and alleged psychic WT Stead. Murray himself was an occult enthusiast and member of the Ghost Club. As Wallis Budge recalled in his memoirs, the two friends believed the Egyptian Rooms were visited every night by the souls of the mummies that were kept in it. Stead examined the painted face of the priestess of Amen-Ra and felt her expression was “that of a living soul in torment”. They asked for Wallis Budge's permission to spend a night in the rooms and hold a séance, but he refused.

Psychic investigator Elliott O'Donnell was of the same opinion as Murray and Stead. In *The Haunted Houses of London* (1909), he declared the Egyptian Rooms to be full of ghosts: “their name is legion,” he wrote, “the very atmosphere is impregnated with them.” Apparently, visiting the Museum could entail psychic danger: while standing by the Unlucky Mummy, he “instinctively felt that something had passed through the glass frame containing the mummy case and had planted itself by my side”, clinging to him, following him round for weeks. Malignant elementals kept peeking at him from behind curtains or from over balustrades with their “strange dark faces, all of them Egyptian both in colouring and cast of features.” Was this a fear of ghosts or a fear of the colonial Other?

When WT Stead died in the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912, his death – and that of the other hundreds – was attributed to the mummy's curse (see **FT136:40-43**). Rumours that the Unlucky Mummy was on board were untrue: the coffin lid remained at the British Museum. The tale never quite faded, and even in the 1930s people said

that the priestess of Amen-Ra haunted the tube station on the corner of Great Russell Street, linked with the Egyptian Rooms through a secret tunnel. Its malignant influence was supposed to have caused the station's closure: the authorities were merely trying to protect Londoners from it.

The subject of another rumour was the mummy of Nesmin, priest of Thetis, purchased in 1885 by Walter Ingram, son of the founder of the *Illustrated London News*. The mummy bore an inscription that revealed a terrible fate for whoever disturbed it: a violent death, followed by a rush of waters that would drag their remains to the sea, mangling them, and therefore, denying them the possibility of an afterlife according to ancient Egyptian beliefs. In 1888, three years after having purchased the mummy, Ingram was trampled to death by a wounded elephant he'd shot in Somaliland. He was buried there, but a later expedition couldn't find his remains: floods were said to have washed them away.

The story contained all the elements of the perfect curse narrative, so it doesn't come as a surprise that Rudyard Kipling,

who heard it at a London Club, wrote a letter to his friend Henry Rider Haggard retelling it for him. However, even though Ingram was certainly trampled to death by an elephant, the inscription accompanying the mummy contained no reference to a curse, as Wallis Budge later ascertained. It didn't matter: the mummy's curse had already conquered the popular imagination, and the narrative would perfect itself with the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922.

THE CURSE OF KING TUT

On 26 November 1922, archaeologist Howard Carter and his patron, the 5th Earl of Carnarvon, stood before a sealed door within what they believed was the tomb of Tutankhamun, an 18th-dynasty pharaoh, in the Valley of the Kings. Carter made a small hole in the doorway and peered inside, with the help of a candle. "Can you see anything?" asked Carnarvon. "Yes," Carter famously replied. "Wonderful things." They had discovered the antechamber of the tomb, packed with everything the king might need in an afterlife. It would

take months of work to access the burial chamber, the pharaoh's final resting place, but they finally did, on 16 February 1923.

On 21 March, best-selling novelist Marie Corelli wrote about her concern regarding the discovery: "According to a rare book I possess, the most dire punishment follows any rash intruder into a sealed tomb." She'd heard rumours that Carnarvon had fallen ill. "I cannot but think that some risks are run by breaking into the last rest of a king of Egypt whose tomb is specially and solemnly guarded, and robbing him of possessions," she wrote days later. "This is why I ask: was it a mosquito bite that has so seriously infected Lord Carnarvon?"

Shortly after her words were published, on 5 April 1923, Carnarvon died in a hospital in Cairo, six weeks after having entered the tomb of Tutankhamun. The cause of death was blood poisoning (caused by an infected mosquito bite whose scab he'd accidentally cut off while shaving) complicated by a bout of pneumonia – but newspapers quickly attributed it to the pharaoh's curse.

Some of these reports told of supposed warnings that Carter and Carnarvon had ignored: that they had found a clay tablet inscribed with a curse, which they destroyed to avoid scaring their labourers; that Carnarvon's pet canary had been ominously devoured by a cobra, the symbol of pharaonic power. The authors of Egyptian Gothic fiction weighed in: Conan Doyle went back to his favourite explanation, suggesting that "an evil elemental may have caused Lord Carnarvon's fatal illness". In contrast, Rider Haggard and Algernon Blackwood dismissed the possibility that Carnarvon had been killed by supernatural causes.

The *Daily Express* reported that the



PHOTOS: HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: Howard Carter (left) opening the entrance to the fourth chamber of Tutankhamun's tomb, February 1923. **ABOVE:** The Earl of Carnarvon relaxes with a book in Egypt, February 1923; six weeks later, he would be dead.



BELOW: A canopic coffinette discovered in the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1923. **LEFT:** Less than a decade later, Karl Freund's 1932 film *The Mummy*, with Karloff as Imhotep, brought the Egyptian Gothic squarely into the age of cinema.

The sensational discovery of Tutankhamun inspired a narrative that fed itself with fragments of an imaginary Egypt that had become part of the zeitgeist: a mixture of imperial anxieties and supernatural fears that invested mummies with magical powers. Even now, this imaginary Egypt is very much part of our popular culture: the stillness of the mummy and its liminal nature continue to fascinate us. Karl Freund, who directed Universal's *The Mummy* (1932), knew it well, and delivered the film's most powerful scare with remarkable subtlety: seeing the mummy of Imhotep slowly open its eyes still fills us with dread and wonder.

NOTES

1 Perhaps one of the most astonishing episodes in Pettigrew's career took place in 1852, when he embalmed the body of the 10th Duke of Hamilton, one of his patients, following Egyptian procedures. The Duke was a Mason, former Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, and a collector of antiquities. In 1836 he'd bought an Egyptian sarcophagus, in which, according to Augustus JC Hare, he would often lie down "to see how it fitted". The sarcophagus had been clearly manufactured for somebody shorter than him at least by eight inches, but this didn't affect his decision. While, according to Hare, "they had to cut off his feet", other accounts imply that the duke's legs had to be broken and rearranged with a sledge-hammer to fulfil his final wish.

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EXHIBITION

TUTANKHAMUN: Treasures of the Golden Pharaoh will be at the Saatchi Gallery, London, from 2 November 2019 to 3 May 2020.

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British Museum had received an "avalanche of parcels" containing mummies' hands and feet, though internal papers from the Museum prove this was a tale fabricated by the newspaper. In spite of efforts to contain it, the curse narrative was strong: the deaths of anyone who had ties with Carnarvon or who had visited the excavation were blamed on the fury of King Tut, even if they happened decades after the discovery. Some suggested radiation was behind these deaths, an idea likely inspired by Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven*



Stars (1903). The theory of poisonous mould spores is still circulating, as if trying to provide a rational basis for these tales (in fact, this was first suggested by Conan Doyle). But, in truth, only six of the people who first entered Tutankhamun's tomb died within a decade, and Howard Carter, who, in theory, should have been its first victim, died in 1939 at the age of 64.

One of the driving principles of the Gothic is a violent irruption of the past. By definition, archaeologists literally disturb a past that is buried under the soil, an act that in fiction often leads to dire consequences.

NO NEED TO SEARCH THE SKIES

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TO HOME



T-SHIRT



MUG



TEA TOWEL

DISCOVER FT'S NEW RANGE OF GIFTS AT
SEARCH MORETVICAR.COM FOR 'FORTEAN TIMES'

IT WAS ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO TODAY THE BOOK OF THE DAMNED

ULRICH MAGIN marks the centenary of *The Book of the Damned* with a look back at the publication, critical reception and literary influence of Charles Fort's unprecedented meditation on the world of strange phenomena

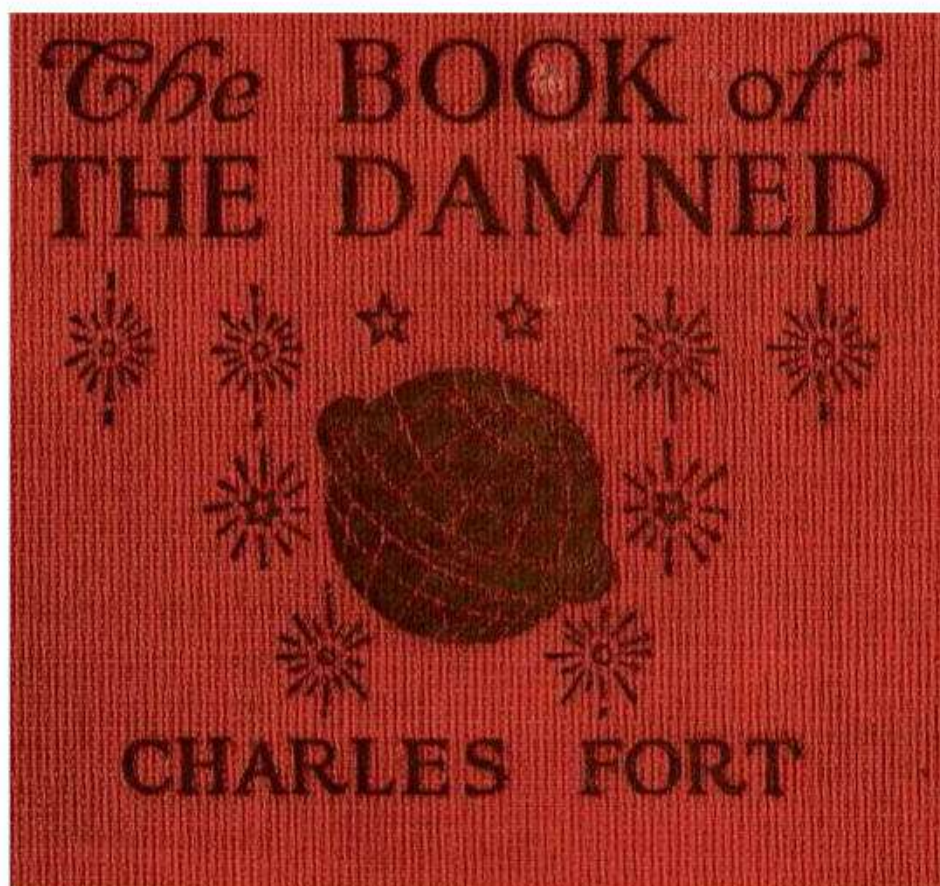
When the *Book of the Damned* appeared late in 1919, the world was not ready for it. Never before had anything like it been published: this was something completely new, seemingly neither fact nor fiction, filled with words and sentences as strange as anything in Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Fort had only written fiction up to this point: short stories, a conventional novel in an unconventional style, and some long-lost attempts at unconventional novels, *X* and *Y*, which might today be classed as conspiracy fiction. Then came his masterpiece, *The Book of the Damned*, which he had almost finished in the spring of 1919. It was only published because Fort's friend, the novelist Theodore Dreiser, forced his publishers, Boni and Liveright of New York, to put it out. Liveright agreed so as not to lose one of his top authors, but he feared it would only cost him money. Yet the book was moderately successful, and it had an immediate impact on modern American intellectuals.¹

The official publication date was 1 December 1919. The first edition of the book was bound in "red cloth, gold lettering on front cover", had 298 pages, and a cover price of \$1.90.²

However, it only appeared in stores across the country in January 1920; Fort himself signed a copy to his wife on 7 January.³ The book was twice reprinted, once in February 1920, and for the second time in February 1931.⁴ Bearing in mind that the initial print run of Fort's later *New Lands* was 1,000 copies, we can assume that *The Book of the Damned* sold roughly that figure within a year of release.

Fort even had a press man in the publishing house, Edward Bernays, who said: "The book received much publicity, as we tied it in with news coverage of scientific events."⁵ These promotional articles appeared as far from New York as Oamaru, New Zealand.



LEFT: The first edition of *The Book of the Damned* featured gold lettering and design on a red cover.

"No imaginative writer could conjure up stranger visions"

THE CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS

As obscure as the book seemed, a surprising number of newspapers, magazines, and journals reviewed Fort's first opus. Write-ups appeared in all the major New York newspapers – possibly due to the fact that Boni & Liveright was a publishing house with a good reputation for modern literature.

The *New York Times* did not like it – not at all. While also reviewing *A History of the Theatre* and *My Escape from Germany*, the anonymous critic clearly cannot understand what the book is about and is left wanting conclusions that Fort did not offer. Stating that one expects horror and sensations, and

quoting Fort's description of the procession of the damned, he continues:

"But after that, except that the jerky, Rabelaisian trick of style is maintained throughout the nearly 300 tedious pages, it is all painfully and boresomely commonplace. What the author seems to mean – if he means anything – is that science and wordly sentiment exclude from the realm of possibility various phenomena which actually have existed... So the book is filled with alleged authenticated reports of red, blue, and pink snow, live frogs imbedded in ice falling from the clouds, meteorites of

unknown substance, flakes of snow seven inches in diameter, and so on... Whether he reaches any conclusion in connection therewith, or what that conclusion is if he does reach it, is so obscured in the mass of words – a quagmire of pseudo-science and queer speculation – that the average reader will find himself either buried alive or insane before he reaches the end. But the queerness of the book may be its salvation. There are persons in Greenwich Village, who may enjoy puzzling through it."⁶ (The *Times* made good when, a few years later, on the publication of Fort's second book, *New Lands*, they exclaimed that *The Book of the Damned* had been "volcanic".)⁷

The *New York Tribune* was nicer than the *Times*. They wrote on 17 January 1920: "*The Book of the Damned* makes fascinating reading. No imaginative fiction writer could conjure up stranger visions than Mr Fort creates in his collection of mysterious happenings all over the world."⁸

Others also liked it, although possibly with a little help from a promotional text provided by the publisher. *Current Literature* (1888-1925) was a New York City magazine established "to deal with current literature



ABOVE: Fort with Theodore Dreiser, who had used his considerable influence with publishers Boni and Liveright to ensure they put out *The Book of the Damned*.
BELOW: Playwright and screenwriter Ben Hecht was a notable early evangelist for Fort and his work, writing one of the most positive reviews of the book.

in an eclectic way". It changed its name to *Current Opinion* in 1913 when it began to look more like an illustrated news magazine. In 1920, it carried a review of *The Book of the Damned*, just after dealing with GK Chesterton's *Irish Impressions*:

"*The Book of the Damned*, by Charles Fort... is the strangest book we have seen in many a day. By 'the damned,' he explains, he means 'the excluded.' For 12 years he has been collecting data ignored by science and by the wordly wise. He wants us to realise that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy. The book is filled with alleged authenticated reports of red, blue and pink snow, black rains and rains like blood, frogs and toads falling from the skies, meteorites of uncertain substance, unaccountable shadows on clouds, dark forms that move and merge in the moon, etc., etc. Things that without the formidable mass of evidence adduced would be incredible support the

author's argument, which he develops in a fascinating manner with strong touches of sardonic humour."⁹

Some lines of this text must have been from Bernays's advertisement blurb, as they are repeated in a critique in *The Weekly Review*. This journal, like so many others, did not really know what to make of the strange new work:

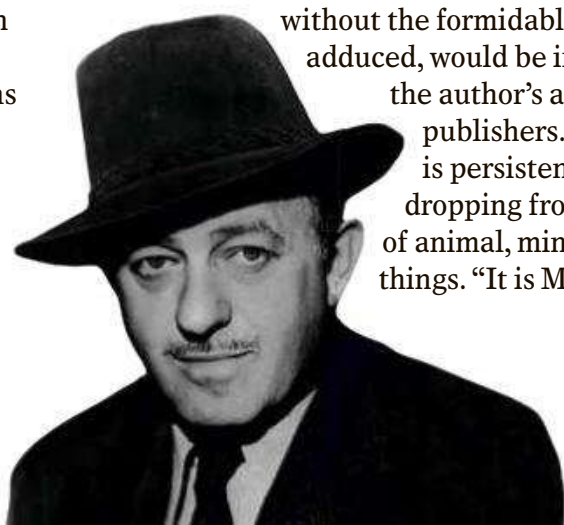
"Mr Charles Fort has, after 12 years of patient research, finished his *Book of the Damned* and Messrs. Boni and Liveright have published it. With enormous industry the author has collected accounts from newspapers, scientific reviews, books, personal statements, gossip, and traditions of all the things, commonplace or weird, which have fallen on the earth. 'Things that, without the formidable mass of evidence adduced, would be incredible, support the author's argument'; thus, the publishers. Apparently there is persistent and tremendous dropping from the sky of all sorts of animal, mineral, and vegetable things. "It is Mr Fort's purpose to

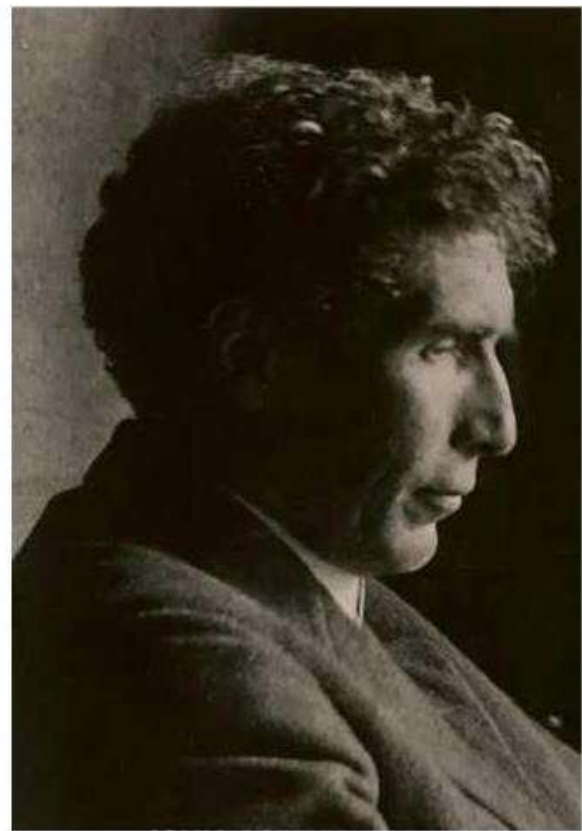
prove that these missiles are hurled at us by the inhabitants of other planets who take this method of letting us know of their existence. The reader will probably suppose that the 'Damned' is Mr Fort. The 'Damned,' however, prove to be this 'procession of data' and the author's ingenious hypothesis which Dogmatic Science has excluded from the kingdom of heaven. It is a curious collection which may tend to increase the placidity of a scholar's postprandial pipe."¹⁰

FIRST FORTEANS

The best-known review is also one of the first statements by a famous writer. Ben Hecht's enthusiastic write-up appeared in the *Chicago Daily News* on 21 January 1920:

"I am the first disciple of Charles Fort. He has made a terrible onslaught upon the accumulated lunacy of 50 centuries. The onslaught will perish. The lunacy will survive, intrenching itself behind the derisive laughter of all good citizens. I, however, for one, rush to surrender my homage. Whatever the purpose of Charles Fort, he has delighted me beyond all men



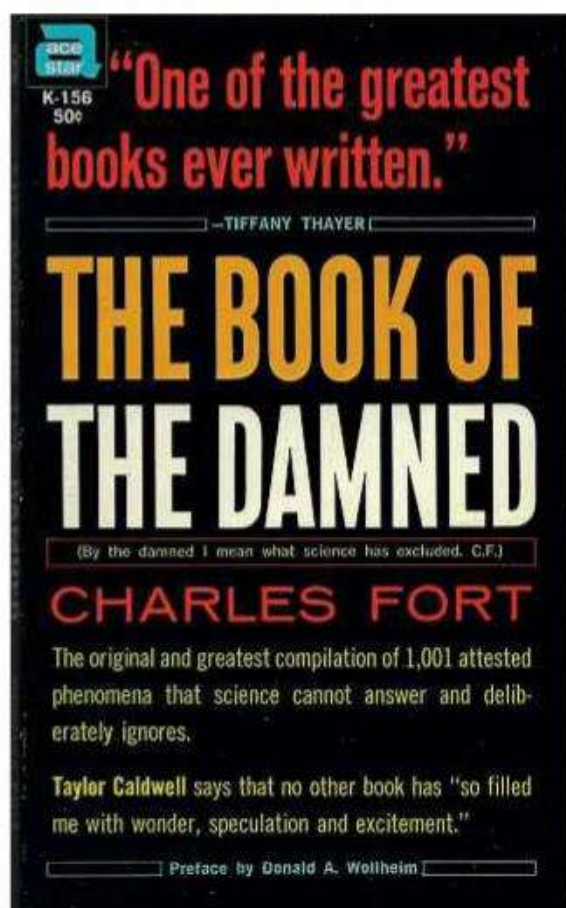


ABOVE: Three champions of *The Book of the Damned*: Booth Tarkington, Alexander Woollcott and John Cowper Powys. As Woollcott recalled, enthusiasm for the book made “strange bedfellows... [of] such distinctly improbable associates as Theodore Dreiser, John Cowper Powys, Ben Hecht, Tiffany Thayer, and myself...”

who have written books in this world. Mountebank or Messiah, it matters not. Henceforth I am a Fortean. If it has pleased Charles Fort to perpetrate a Gargantuan jest upon unsuspecting readers, all the better. If he has in all seriousness heralded forth the innermost truths of his soul, well and good. I offer him this testament. I believe. Who is Charles Fort? Charles Fort is an inspired clown who, to the accompaniment of a gigantic snare drum, has bounded into the arena of science and let fly at the pontifical seats of wisdom with slapstick and bladder. He has plucked the false whiskers off the planets. He has reinvented a god. He has exposed the immemorial hoax that bears the name of sanity. In the light of all reason he stands – a gibbering idiot thumbing his nose at the awful presence of world intelligence. It is all in the point of view. The point of view of Charles Fort is the point of view of the Mad Hatter and the Jack of Clubs...

“If I should attempt to record here the theories, the excited surmises, the nightmarish leaps, the sulphuric revels of the brain of Charles Fort I should achieve instant prominence as a humourist – an unconscious humourist, of course. Yet it is a deplorably selfish thing to deprive the heroic readers of Mr Sell’s page the pleasure of a laugh... Charles Fort has taken issue with the conventions of astronomy, geology, anthropology, ethnology and philology, and shot the scientific basis of modern wisdom full of large, ugly holes – holes through which monstrous ideas poke their unearthly heads, through which awful shapes and demoniac colours whirl for an instant in an apocalyptic dance... I have a picture in my mind of Charles Fort standing with his thumb to his nose grinning back – no, laughing back. The laughter of the world at Charles Fort and all other Forts who have

“For every five people who read this book four will go insane”



been is the conventional guffaw – the croak out of the stagnant dream that calls itself reason. And the laughter of Charles Fort, I his disciple assure you, is the shriek of the banshee that has ever haunted and troubled

this dream. The book into which Charles Fort has put his shriek is called *The Book of the Damned*. It is published by Boni & Liveright. Perhaps you have no time for such nonsense. You prefer the concrete eruditions of poppycockiana, political and moral perunas. If so you will ignore a delicious opportunity to laugh with or at Charles Fort. For it is written that the theory he has hurled into being is destined, like some phantom gargoyle, to perch itself astride every telescope and laboratory test tube in the land. For every five people who read this book four will go insane.”¹¹

Another famous American man of letters, Booth Tarkington, reviewed the book for the monthly magazine *The Bookman* in August 1920. This seems to have been a text especially commissioned for an ad to promote *The Book of the Damned*, and strangely enough, it appeared anonymously:

“Who in the name of frenzy is Charles Fort? Author of *The Book of the Damned*. I’m just pulling up from influenza and this blamed book kept me up all night when I certainly should have slept – and then, in the morning, what is a fevered head to do with assemblies of worlds, some shaped like wheels, some connected by streaming filaments, and one spindle shaped with an axis 100,000 miles long? [... Fort is] ‘colossal’ – a magnificent nut, with Poe and Blake and Cagliostro and St. John trailing way behind him. And with a gorgeous mad man’s humor! ... People must turn to look at his head as he walks down the street; I think it’s a head that would emit noises and explosions, with copper flames playing out from the ears.”¹²

Years later, in his introduction for *New Lands*, Tarkington recalled his reading experience: “I turned back to the beginning and read this vigorous and astonishing book straight through, and then re-read it

for the pleasure it gave me in the way of its writing and in the substance of what it told. Doré should have illustrated it, I thought, or Blake. Here indeed was a 'brush dipped in earthquake and eclipse'; though the wildest mundane earthquakes are but earthquakes in teapots compared to what goes on in the visions conjured up before us by Mr Charles Fort. For he deals in nightmare, not on the planetary, but on the constellation scale, and the imagination of one who staggers along after him is frequently left gasping and flaccid."¹³

Like Dreiser and Hecht, Tarkington tried to win new converts. Recalled critic and commentator Alexander Woollcott (1887-1943), a member of the infamous Algonquin Round Table, in June 1931: "But I have been a Fortean ever since Booth Tarkington took me firmly aside, some six or seven years ago, and sat me down before a startling and ominous trumpet blast called *The Book of the Damned*. It was by one Charles Fort. Ever since, I have been full of enthusiasm for the works of this singular man. That enthusiasm makes strange bedfellows. For example, such distinctly improbable associates as Theodore Dreiser, John Cowper Powys, Ben Hecht, Tiffany Thayer, and myself, all eyeing one another a little sheepishly, are now united with Mr. Tarkington in a society organised for the spreading of Charles Fort's gospel among our comatose contemporaries."¹⁴

In another Boni & Liveright ad in *The Nation*, American philosopher Benjamin De Casseres, obviously also having been solicited, has a few words on Fort: "Benjamin De Casseres says of *The Book of the Damned*, by Charles Fort, recently published by us: 'Who is Fort? He is a great satirist, a thinker, an epigrammatist, and possesses an imagination of the first order. He has written the greatest satire on science and human intelligence since Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pecuchet*.'"¹⁵

Obviously, from the start, Fort was a writer's writer – admired for his style, wit, and the sheer strangeness of his ideas. *The New York Times* was disgusted because they took him for a science, or pseudo-science, writer, not grasping that *The Book of the Damned* proposes the uncertainty of all knowledge, not just of scientific knowledge. *The National Jewish Monthly*, commenting on Hecht's support of Fort, could only puzzle that "out of the collection of his scientific admirations, however, Hecht singles for particular praise one Charles Fort, a wild, credulous romancer, who is willing to believe anything."¹⁶

The book's literary quality was embraced in a review in *The Psychoanalytic Review*: "An extraordinary book! There's no doubt of that. But just in what way it's extraordinary, that's the question. The first chapter arrests the attention both by its style and by its matter. It proposes to discuss various data that science has excluded, these are the damned. Then comes a figurative enumeration of the damned as they pass in processional



ABOVE: H.L. Mencken declared himself "puzzled" by the book and called Fort a "pseudo-scientific quack".

which reminds one of the Dance of Death... The author then goes on by way of defining the attitude he is going to take toward the damned, to state his philosophy, in a very imperious way as if he were offering something quite new and of inestimable value... The whole effort, whether we take it seriously or as a joke, is scientifically a tilting at windmills by a modern Don Quixote armed with a super-futuristic style."¹⁷

THE LITERARY FORT

Ben Hecht's enthusiastic endorsement of Fort has already been mentioned, but it was the 'naturalist' novelist Theodore Dreiser who became one of Fort's greatest supporters, believing him to be the greatest American writer since Poe. It was Dreiser who tried to get other famous writers interested in Fort, sending copies of *The Book of the Damned* to such luminaries as Walter Yust, Monroe Upton, Joseph Henry Jackson, and to friends like John Cowper Powys, Edward McDonald, and Harry Elmer Barnes. With some he was successful, with others he failed miserably.¹⁸

Of the many intellectuals who were asked for an opinion by Dreiser, only two were violently averse to the book. H.G. Wells's rejection of Fort, although expressed only when he was invited to join the Fortean Society, is pretty sharp: "I'm having Fort's *Book of the Damned* sent back to you. Fort seems to be one of the most damnable bores who ever cut scraps from out of the way newspapers. I thought they were facts. And he writes like a drunkard... what do you mean by forcing 'orthodox science' to do this or that? Science is a continuing exploration and how in the devil can it have an orthodoxy? The next you'll be writing is the 'dogmas of science' like some blasted Roman

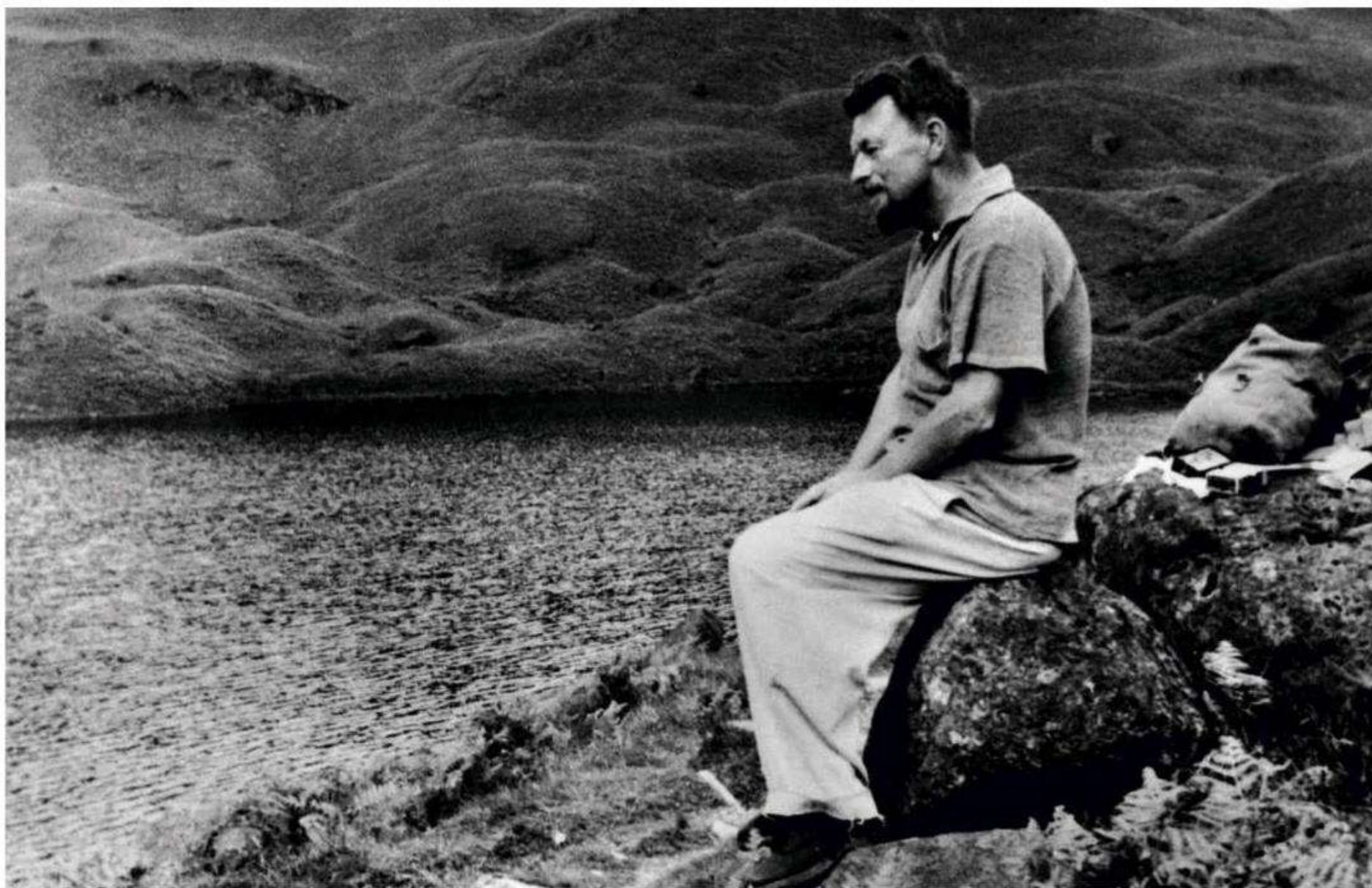
Catholic priest on the defensive. When you tell a Christian you don't believe some yarn he can't prove, he always call you 'dogmatic'. Scientific workers are first rate stuff and very ill paid and it isn't for the likes of you and me to heave Forts at them."¹⁹

HL Mencken was hardly better. After being pushed again and again by Dreiser to find Fort worthwhile, he wrote, after the book was out: "I have just read Fort's *Book of the Damned* and note your remarks upon the slip cover. If they are authentic, what is the notion that you gather from this book? Is it that Fort seriously maintains there is an Upper Sargasso Sea somewhere in the air, and that all of the meteors, blood, frogs and other things he lists, dropped out of it? The thing leaves me puzzled."²⁰ He also called Fort a "pseudo-scientific quack."²¹

Yet, despite Liveright's fears that the book would never attract any attention, Louis J Zanine notes that it received "several reviews by major American authors" which showed "that Fort's theories appealed not only to Dreiser's peculiar tastes."²²

The book was obviously admired by those who later joined the Fortean Society – Dreiser, Burton Rascoe, Harry Elmer Barnes, John Cowper Powys, Booth Tarkington, and Harry Leo – and references to it appear in many unexpected places, from authors one might never have suspected to be readers of Fort; sometimes they are as enthusiastic as the endorsements by members of the Fortean Society.

Take Henry Miller, for example. In a January 1941 letter to French-American writer Anais Nin, he urged her to read the book. "Anais, you should try to get hold of a



ABOVE: Of all the literary admirers of *The Book of the Damned* none made a greater effort to incorporate Fort's vision into his own work than the novelist Malcolm Lowry. **BELOW:** Lowry's *Under the Volcano* owed a great debt to Fort's books, particularly *Lo!* and *Wild Talents*.

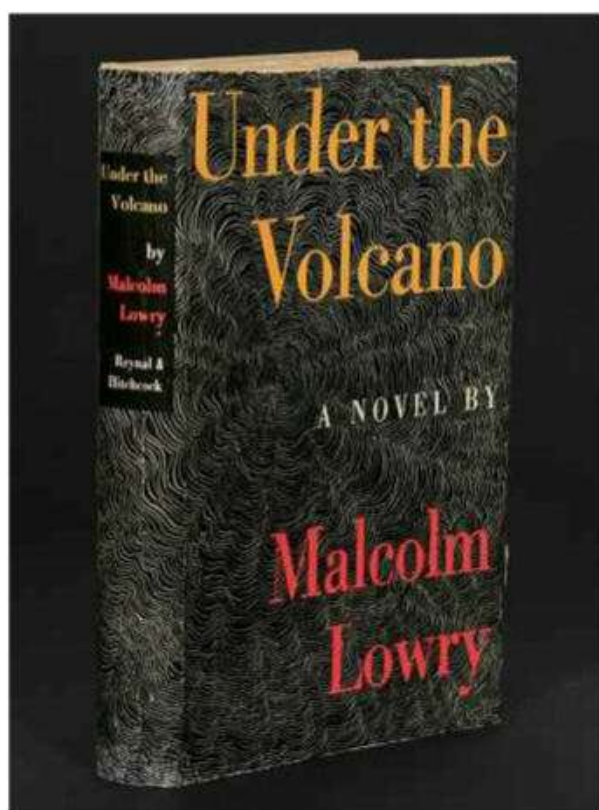
book by Charles Fort called *The Book of the Damned*. It is a very queer book – you will see. Read it thoroughly – contains startling data and still more startling beliefs.”²³

It is clear that Miller admired Fort for his writing, and his ideas, not as a reformer of science. Hardly any of the many leading names who proselytised for Fort did.

Mina Loy (1882–1966), the designer, actor, and poet (whose work was admired by TS Eliot), and surrealist photographer Clarence John Laughlin (1905–1985) became friends due to their mutual admiration of Fort when they met at a party. Both had experienced the “visionary *The Book of the Damned* [as] a revelation when it appeared”.²⁴

Laughlin read Fort long before he took up photography in 1935, and “he had absorbed the main ideas of this little-known American dreamer. It is from Charles Fort and the writers kin to him that Clarence Laughlin derived the principal ideas that underlie his photography.”²⁵

That Malcolm Lowry, most famous for his *Under the Volcano*, and the film of it by John Huston, was a dedicated fortean is well known (see FT328:40-43), and his main influence was *Lo!*, Fort's third book, which impressed Lowry so much that he tried to write his novel *October Ferry to Gabriola* in an imitation of its style (in the end, Lowry was too good a writer to copy anybody). Still,



a number of lengthy passages in *Under the Volcano* are lifted straight out of *Lo!* and *Wild Talents*.²⁶ In his *In Ballast to the White Sea*, Lowry directly quotes *The Book of the Damned*.²⁷

Lowry meditated on the experience of discovering Fort for the first time: In *October Ferry to Gabriola*, Ethan, one of the characters, reads *The Book of the Damned*.

“Ethan was skipping back and forth in the omnibus from book to book by this time – into another book called *The Book of the Damned*, into yet another called *New Worlds* – all of so obviously extraordinary a kind one felt astonishment that its author's name had not long since become a household word. Surely few writers were ever capable so swiftly and convincingly of disaffecting a reader from the regular bounds of his cosmos. Although in one sense Fort didn't widen them, he narrowed them. In ten minutes more Ethan had become convinced that the source of Niagara-on-the-Lake's black fog... were perhaps unknown lands situated at relatively no great distance in the dark nebulae, that celestial visitors of all kinds were no uncommon occurrence... The cumulative effect was terrifying; yet, for all that, Ethan thought to himself again, oddly reassuring.”²⁸

Lowry seems to have admired Fort not only as an imaginative and innovative writer, but as a scientist, too. In his autobiographical *Sursum Corda*, he talks about “a neglected, but exciting American writer, whose specialty is the analysis of peculiar coincidences for which there exists no scientific explanation, is Charles Fort, particularly for the three books *Lo!*, *The Book of the Damned* and *Wild Talents*. I look upon the day I first hit upon *Lo!* in a public library

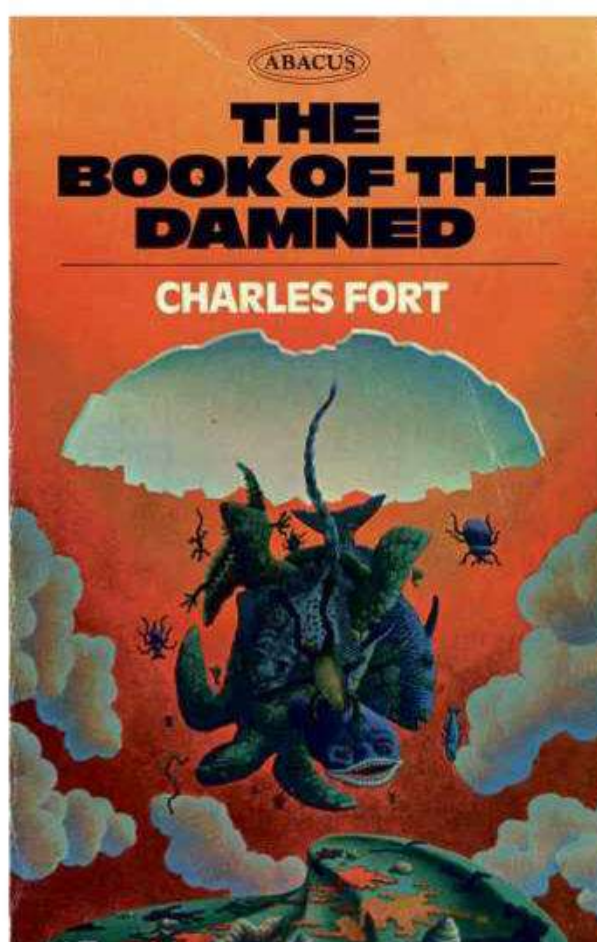
as a red-letter day in my life. I know of no writer who has made the inexplicable seem more dramatic than Charles Fort.”²⁹

While some writers, like Lowry, first discovered Fort through his later works or in the *Collected Books* issued in 1941, we do not know how the great poet and utterly inept politician Ezra Pound first encountered Fort. Perhaps it was through his son-in-law, Boris de Rachewiltz, a member of the Fortean Society who was later instrumental in getting Pound released from prison when he was locked up for treason after delivering pro-fascist radio talks; Pound’s daughter, Mary de Rachewiltz, certainly knew Tiffany Thayer and other forteans well. In 1931, Pound contributed “Publishers, Pamphlets and Other Things” to *Contempo: A Review of Books and Personalities*, where he listed as ‘great living American writers’, “Cabell, Robinson Jeffers, Masters, Mencken, Nathan, Charles Fort.”³⁰

PROPHET OF THE UFOs

Who could be farther from the elitist Pound than a socialist writer like Upton Sinclair (1878-1968), whom Theodore Roosevelt derided as a muckraker. Perhaps he was another of Dreiser’s converts. In the late work *What Didymus Did* (UK 1954/US 1958), Sinclair used a famous line from the *Book of the Damned*: “Brooding over this, my mind recalled four ominous words which had been written by Charles Fort, a man who spent a lifetime collecting strange and forbidding facts about our world: ‘We are fished for.’”³¹

The book, noted literary magazine *Time & Tide*, is a “parable about a modern St Thomas (called Didymus), a young gardener, who is guided by angels”, but “although studded with references to the mystics (not forgetting Charles Fort, that neglected



RIGHT: Fort in the age of UFOs: A 1970s British paperback edition of *The Book of the Damned*.

‘John the Baptist’ of the flying saucers) it never becomes more than high level entertainment.”³²

This marks a turning point in the reception of Fort. That his name and books remained in the public consciousness at all was due not just to his literary supporters, but, and to an ever-growing degree, to the coming of the UFOs. Fort was no longer regarded as a literary figure, but as “another flying saucer author”. HP Lovecraft admired him (especially *The Book of the Damned*,

which he recommended to his followers), but as a source of ideas, not as a writer.³³

Much later, Paul Auster, in his *Moon Palace*, characterises an elderly lady as eccentric as she falls “for harebrained fads – Fletcherism, Symmes’s holes, the books of Charles Fort.”

³⁴ By the 1940s interest in *The Book of the Damned* seems largely to have been confined to occultists, flying saucer buffs, and science-fiction authors. As for ‘literary’ writers, he no longer counted. *The Book of the Damned*, and even more so *New Lands*, ended up as mines to be harvested for future UFO books.

Fort – once seen as an avant-garde writer with a unique style – became, in the public perception, just another crank. He was quoted as an authority on UFOs by the newspapers, often as if he were a household name. It may have been partly his own fault: by the time he wrote *New Lands*, he had started to sound as if he believed in his cosmological models.

When the flying saucers appeared in 1947, Fort’s legacy was assured: he would be remembered not as a great modern writer, but as the prophet of the UFOs. He is mentioned, merely as a pseudo-scientist, by J Allen Hynek in two of his assessments of the UFO phenomenon (in the *Findings of Project Sign*, 30 December 1947, and in the *Summary of Project Grudge* 30 April 1949,³⁵ and as the first ufologist in a popular *Reader’s Digest* article in July 1952.³⁶ From this point on, most people leafing through *The Book of the Damned* had come in search of alien astronauts and spacecraft from outer space.

✦ **ULRICH MAGIN** is a lifelong fortean, author of *Investigating the Impossible* (2011) and compiler of FT’s ‘Strange Continent’ column. He lives in Germany.

NOTES

- 1 The quite fascinating history of the publication problems is told in Damon Knight, *Charles Fort: Prophet of the Unexplained*, Doubleday & Company, 1970, pp51–62; Jim Steinmeyer, *Charles Fort: The Man Who Invented the Supernatural*, TarcherPerigee, 2008, pp165-166; Mike Dash, “Charles Fort and a Man Named Dreiser”, **FT51:40-48**; Ulrich Magin, *Der Ritt auf dem Kometen – über Charles Fort*, Zweitausendeins, 1997, pp98-104. See also: Charles Egleston, *The House of Boni & Liveright, 1917-1933: A Documentary Volume*, Gale, 2004, p43.
- 2 *INFO-Journal* 48, www.biblio.com/book/book-damned-fort-charles/d/62115104
- 3 Steinmeyer, p173.
- 4 www.resologist.net/damnei.htm
- 5 Quoted in Steinmeyer, p184f.
- 6 *New York Times*, 8 Feb 1920.
- 7 *New York Times*, 25 Nov 1923.

- 8 Steinmeyer, p13, 185. Steinmeyer also mentions a review in *Life* in 1920, but I couldn’t locate it.
- 9 *Current Opinion*, vol. 68, 1920, p425.
- 10 *Weekly Review*, vol. 2, No. 41, p184.
- 11 Quoted in *Fortean Society Magazine*, no. 3, Jan 1940, pp5-6.
- 12 Knight, p69; Steinmeyer, p182.
- 13 *Fortean Society Magazine*, no. 2, Oct 1937, p5.
- 14 *McCall’s*, June 1931, p8.
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- 16 *National Jewish Monthly*, vol. 39, 1925, p177.
- 17 *Psychoanalytic Review*, vol 8, 1920, pp108-109.
- 18 Louis J Zanine: *Mechanism and Mysticism: The Influence of Science On the Thought and Work of Theodore Dreiser*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993, p129.
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- 24 Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy*, 1996, p399.
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- 26 Lawrence J Clipper, Christopher Ackerley, *A Companion to Under the Volcano*, UBC Press, 2011, p105, 277, 336, 449.
- 27 Malcolm Lowry, Patrick A McCarthy (ed.), *In Ballast to the White Sea*, University of Ottawa Press, 2014, p311.
- 28 Malcolm Lowry, *October Ferry to Gabriola: A Novel*, Open Road Media, 2012; also in: Lowry,

- Winter’s Tales*, Macmillan, 1965, p108.
- 29 Malcolm Lowry, Sherrill Grace (ed.), *Sursum Corda! 1926-1946*, University of Toronto Press, 1995, p315.
- 30 The same volume of the magazine also contains a long article praising Lo!
- 31 Upton Sinclair, *What Didymus Did*, A Wingate, 1954, p47; reprinted as *It Happened to Didymus*, Sagamore Press 1958, p47. The original quote is in *The Books of Charles Fort*, p 264.
- 32 *Time & Tide*, vol. 35, 1954, p1586.
- 33 L Sprague deCamp: *Lovecraft: A Biography*, Hachette, 2011.
- 34 Paul Auster, *Moon Palace*, Viking Press, 2007, p248.
- 35 Brad Steiger, *Blue Book*, p172, 222.
- 36 James R Aswell, “Flying Saucers: New in Name Only”, *Reader’s Digest*, July 1952, pp7-9.

THE LUCK OF THE DRAW

The UK's National Lottery is a quarter of a century old this month. **TED HARRISON** looks at some of the statistical anomalies, odd coincidences and claims of psychic foreknowledge that have accompanied 25 years of Camelot's random balls...

Twenty-five years ago, on 19 November 1994, Noel Edmonds and a man from Camelot set the ball rolling. The man from Camelot, meticulously attired in white gloves, released numbered balls from a rack into a machine that frantically mixed and shook them up before ejecting seven at random. Out came numbers 30, 3, 5, 44, 14 and 22 plus a bonus ball 10. The event was much hyped and eagerly watched on television by 25 million people. That first night, seven players shared the jackpot, winning almost £1 million each.

Since then, Britain's national lottery has evolved, been rebranded and had extra games added. Today 32 million people in Britain play the lottery on a regular basis. They play in hope, but are almost invariably destined to be disappointed.

The sobering fact is that any one ticket bought only has a 1 in 45,057,474, chance of winning the UK National Lottery jackpot. To win a big prize by selecting five numbers and the bonus ball, the odds are more favourable, but remain a staggering 1 in 7,509,579. When it comes to the Euromillions jackpot, the odds increase to 1 in 139,838,160.

STRANGE STATISTICS

Despite these astonishing improbabilities, almost from the start the lottery produced anomalous results that appeared to defy statistical logic. When on Saturday, 14 January 1995, the numbers 7, 17, 23, 32, 38 and 42 were drawn there were 133 players with a winning ticket. Instead of becoming millionaires they each had to share the prize and content themselves with a payout of £122,520.

So many are the cases of seeming statistical improbabilities that have occurred, both in Britain and around the world, that the underlying assumption that the draw is entirely random is being questioned.

In July 2014 the gambling website Lottoland conducted extensive research into the lottery results from results across



LEFT: Noel Edmonds with the winning numbers of the very first National Lottery.

than any other ball. Thirteen however has been drawn only 248 times, less often than any other number over 25 years (FT222:11).

Thirteen is widely regarded as an unlucky number and it is therefore not unreasonable to suppose that unlucky 13 is one of the numbers least favoured by players. Is it not weird, then, that the number that is probably least chosen by players is also the one least often to be selected by the

Camelot random number generator? The question raises the incredible and seemingly absurd possibility that the collective will of the players might, in some unaccountable way, influence the workings of the number selection machine.

It is a notion that would be quickly knocked on the head by examining the numbers punters most popularly choose to see if there was any correlation between them and those numbers drawn. Is it the case that 23 is most commonly selected and 13 the least often chosen? However Camelot, the company that runs the UK lottery, refuses to release the information.

Responding to questions emailed by *Fortean Times* in July, the company's communications manager James McGrath wrote: "The most popular combination of numbers selected for the last two Lotto draws are 07, 14, 21, 28, 35, 42 – and 'lucky sevens' has tended to be the most popular combination over time. Numbers 31 and under are also popular because they correspond with meaningful dates for players (e.g. birthdays, anniversaries)."

When asked if the figures for numbers chosen by players had been collated over the history of the lottery, in the same way that the numbers drawn have been collected and published, Mr McGrath said the information was not available. "It's not a case of it being

*Any one ticket has
a 1 in 45,057,474
chance of winning
the jackpot*

the globe to determine whether there were any statistical patterns that bridged international borders. By collating tens of thousands of historical results from eight international lotteries, including the UK National Lottery, the data revealed that the lottery ball which is most often chosen as part of the winning combination is 23 (see FT246:9; and for more on this fortan favourite number, FT23:32, 175:23) and, interestingly for the superstitious, the number which is least often drawn is the number 13.

In the UK, up until July 2019, there had been 2,460 lottery draws. For the first 21 years there were 49 numbers from which players could choose their 'jackpot' six. In 2015, a further 10 numbered balls were added. In the lifetime of the game, number 40 had been drawn 325 times, more times

information that we wouldn't release to the public. It's simply down to the fact that we have a record of numbers drawn going back to launch, but not numbers chosen by players."

There is no suggestion, or evidence, of skulduggery, but suspicious minds think that something is not right, hinting that somehow the power of the collective mind of the players is skewing the outcome. In theory, the lottery provides valuable data for any study of mass psychic effects. It would be a huge challenge

to statistical orthodoxy if it substantiated any possibility of this effect being real. It is not in Camelot's interest to encourage any pseudo-scientific theories that would undermine their business model, which relies on the pure randomness of their number selection process.

In 1995, the results of an intriguing bit of research surfaced. They were the findings of Mark Zilberman, a Russian-born astrophysicist who has made a 10-year study of French and Soviet lotteries.

What he had found was that on certain days the number of correct predictions was greater than what the laws of chance would suggest. There were, he noticed, inexplicable but statistically consistent seasonal variations linked to solar changes and days of low geomagnetic activity. The results suggested that human minds might be able to produce a psychokinetic force strong enough to influence a lottery draw. He was not able to say whether the external factors raised human ability to predict an outcome, or that it increased the human ability to effect the outcome through the power of the mind. He said that lottery results provided a massive database for a study involving normal people who were not selected for their ESP ability and the selection of numbers which the organisers did, making every effort to keep their selections random.

According to the study, it seems that the weaker the Earth's geomagnetic activity, the higher the ratio of winning tickets sold: "The probability of this result occurring randomly was <0.005 ". Seasonal variations produced a consistent, but less dramatic

result than daily fluctuations in geomagnetic activity. The mean chance of holding a winning ticket with three correct digits in the lotteries Zilberman studied is about 123/10,000. In February, he says, the odds are 120/10,000, while in July they come out at 126/10,000. (See Mark Zilberman, 'Artificial Intuition Device and Real Life Lottery Games' (downloadable from <http://www.intellectualarchive.com/?link=item&id=189>); Dean Radin, *The Noetic Universe*, Corgi Books, 2009, p208.)

DREAMING OF WEALTH

State sponsored lotteries can be traced back centuries, possibly to the 2nd century BC in China. They are an effective way of taxing the populace without the taxpayers being aware they are actually being taxed and rely on the human tendency to dream and the inability of the human brain to handle large numbers and probabilities. Lotteries are held in hundreds of countries, cities, and states around the world (the Italians are particularly lottery mad; see **FT201:6, 236:44-47**), and many strange results that seem to challenge the laws of probability have been reported.

On 10 September 2009, the numbers 4, 15, 23, 24, 35 and 42 were chosen at random by the Bulgarian state lottery. Not that unusual, one might suppose – except for the fact that *exactly* the same numbers had been drawn in the lottery four days earlier. On the first occasion, no one had claimed the jackpot, yet the second draw produced 18 winners.

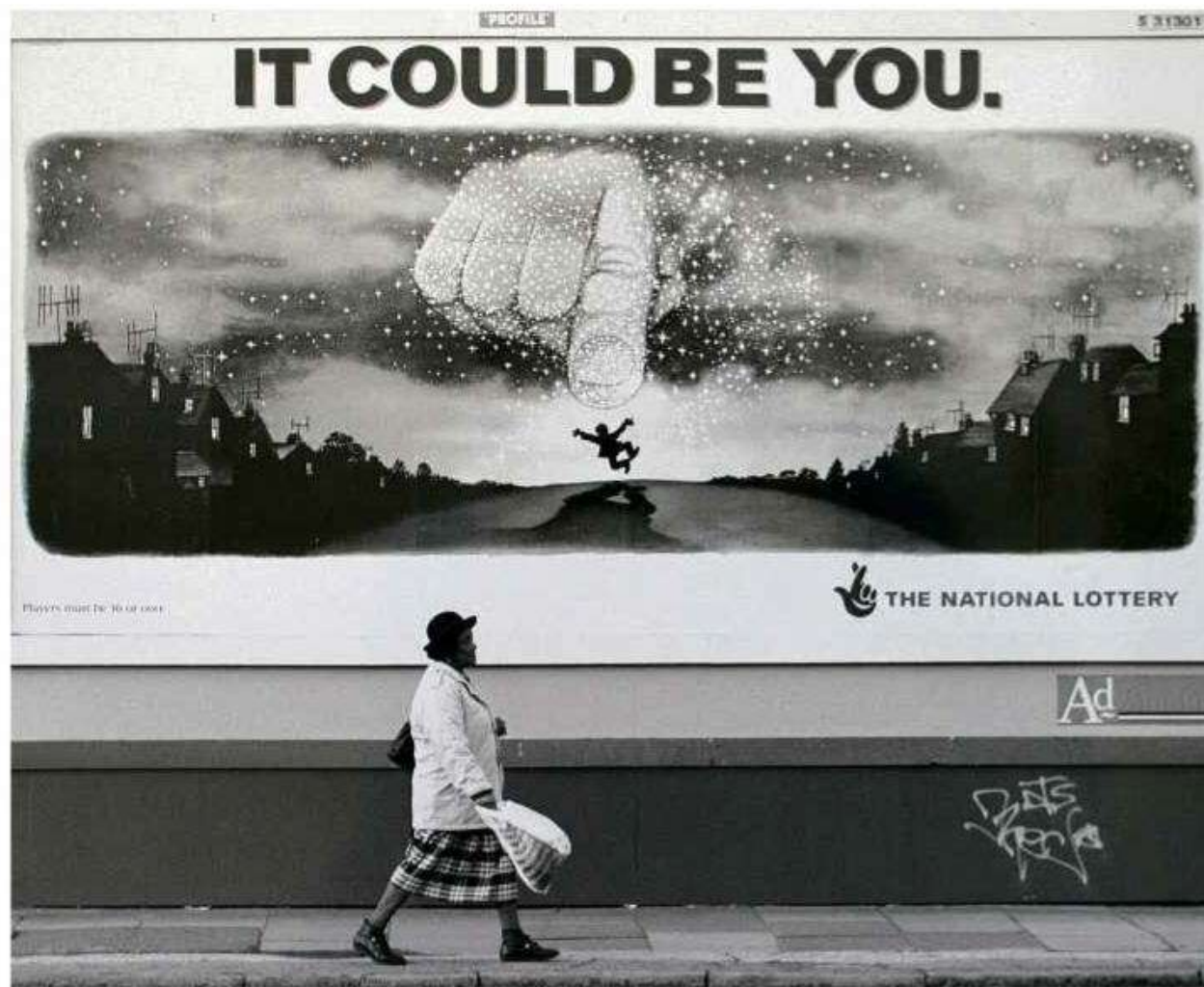
In October 2010, CNN carried a story from Israel saying that the national bi-

weekly lottery had drawn the same six numbers just three weeks apart (**FT271:20**), the only difference being that the second time they had been drawn in reverse order. "Lottery officials at first pulled the result, fearing there was a mechanical error or some sort of tampering with the results. But after investigating the drawing and finding no problems, lottery officials certified Saturday's results, leading to three first-prize winners earning over \$1 million dollars each," the news agency reported.

Some lottery draws have appeared plain spooky. A year after the attack on the New York twin towers, the daily three-number city lottery produced 9,1 and 1. Lottery officials said that 5,631 people had selected the three numbers and would share the winnings. And on the day in November 2001 when American Airlines Flight 587 crashed on the New York coast, the winning New Jersey Lottery numbers were 5,8 and 7 (**FT154:07**). Political opponents of the newly elected Barack Obama in November 2008 were quick to point out that in his home state of Illinois the day after the result was declared the state lottery numbers were 666.

There are also several stories of winners attributing their wins to premonitions. Claims of seeing winning sequences in dreams are not uncommon; however, the case of Mary Wollens of Toronto is certainly unusual. On 30 September 2006 she won \$16 million on the Ontario 6-49 Lotto, having bought two tickets for the draw. She told lottery officials she saw a lotto ticket and a large cheque in a dream a couple of days before the draw and went out to buy a second ticket, using the same combination of numbers she had received on an earlier quick pick ticket. She credits the dream with making her buy the second ticket and so instead of sharing the \$24 million jackpot equally with a joint winner, she took a two-thirds share.

In June 2008, a Carlisle builder called Tony Nutbrown bought his lottery ticket with confidence, having dreamt the night before that he would be the winner. He would perhaps have been even more optimistic had he known then what he was to discover



ABOVE: A poster advertising the first UK National Lottery draw, which took place on 19 November 1994.

JONATHAN PLAYER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

later from his daughter: that a psychic had made the same prediction to her. In due course, when numbers 7, 16, 17, 23, 29, and 34 were drawn, he became one of four jackpot winners, winning a total of £3,038,567 (FT243:10).

“I’ve played the lottery every week for the last 13 years but have never managed to win more than £100 before,” he said. “But for some reason this week I had a premonition that I was going to win something. I’d had a dream the night before where the girl in the shop couldn’t pay out the money because it was so much.”

One lottery premonition ended up in court. A waiter working in a Turkish restaurant in York dreamt he would win the Lottery. Fatih Ozcan envisaged himself holding bundles of cash as his restaurant’s manager, Hayati Kucukkoylu, stood in front of him. The next day Mr Ozcan shared his premonition with his boss and Mr Kucukkoylu gave him money from the till to buy a Euromillions ticket, with the pair winning the Millionaire Raffle and getting their hands on £1million. But the young waiter’s dream turned into a nightmare when his boss declared that all the winnings should be his, as the money used to purchase the ticket came from his till. In the end a judge ruled they should share the windfall (FT318:11).

Catering manager Ocean Kinge, from Aldershot, told friends about a “feeling in her bones” which led her to set up a lottery syndicate with 14 of her work colleagues. They each won £66,666.66 by sharing a £1m prize in the EuroMillions Millionaire Raffle on Christmas Eve 2010. Mrs Kinge said she discovered her special talents after visiting a psychic at the age of 19 and claims she can pick up ‘energies’. “Out of the blue one day I just said: ‘Let’s start a lottery syndicate because I’ve just got a really strong feeling we are going to win a big win at the end of

the year. I said it was going to be a million pounds – don’t ask me how, I just knew.” (For more lottery premonitions see FT59:40, 219:11, FT245:12, 300:09, 318:11, 326:10.)

GAMING THE SYSTEM

Despite the incredibly long odds there are some winners who have made a habit of picking the right numbers. In Texas, a woman has gained \$20 million in prize money by winning on four different occasions. To do this, however, Joan Ginther spent thousands of dollars on tickets, and although she lives in Las Vegas she bought all the tickets from a single rural store in Texas. She has never talked about her strategy, but given that she is a statistician with a PhD from Stanford University, there has been much speculation as to whether she had found a way of playing the mathematics of the game.

By contrast, Marge and Jerry Southbee have talked openly about how they made their millions. They ran a store in Evart, Michigan, that sold cigarettes, liquor, and lottery tickets. Having watched his customers playing Michigan’s Winfall lottery, Jerry thought he could work out how to beat the odds: playing occasionally might make a dollar or two, but playing massively in particular weeks could yield substantial returns. Initially, he did not even share his idea with his wife. But after netting a 100 per cent profit on \$3,400 worth of tickets over two weeks and then successfully repeating the process with an \$8,000 investment he told her – and from then on they collaborated on the scheme. It took a lot of painstaking work examining numbers on tickets and became a full-time occupation. Over nine years of playing this game, and a similar one in another state, they amassed \$27 million.

They explained the system to *The Huffington Post*. They had to visit stores in person, stand in front of machines for

hours, buy tickets, and print them out. When Michigan closed the game they used the same approach to win money in Massachusetts, where the stakes were higher. This required a day’s drive each way to play as well as standing endlessly at the gaming points.

Eventually, the goose of gambling stopped laying the golden eggs when the organisers closed the game down after a group of students started a similar scam. But what they did was not illegal: they simply worked out a way of beating the odds.

“What the Selbees and a small group of statisticians knew,” said *The Huffington Post*, “was that they had a near lock on winning big bucks during the times when no one won the maximum jackpot of roughly \$2 million. If there was no winner for the prize money, it was redistributed among players who had three, four or five matching numbers on their tickets. It practically stops being a game of chance for deep-pocketed players as anyone buying at least \$100,000 of tickets has a 74 per cent chance of turning a profit... It becomes a guaranteed moneymaker for people like the Selbees who spend much more than that.”

The mathematical flaw in the game which Dr Ginther apparently exploited was never made public, but investigative journalist Peter Murca believes he figured it out. One factor was that after her first win, which could have been down to genuine good luck, she had the money to invest in the lottery big time. It so happened that the Texas lottery would ship thousands of scratch-off cards to stores all over the state and it was possible, perhaps with some inside information, as was alleged, to track how many tickets had been shipped, how many prizes were left, and in which stores the likely winners might wind up. With money to invest, tickets could be bought in quantity at the most likely stores to be holding winning tickets.



ABOVE LEFT: O Lucky Man! Frane Selak has survived multiple disasters and won more than £700,000 in the Croatian lottery. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Poor old William ‘Bud’ Post, on the other hand, wished he had never won \$16 million in the Pennsylvania State Lottery after his brother hired a hitman to kill him.



ABOVE: Marge and Jerry Southbee have made millions playing lotteries in Michigan and Massachusetts.

THE IMPROBABILITY PRINCIPLE

Lotteries come in two types. There are those where players choose their own numbers and those where players buy tickets with numbers already printed on them, as with scratch cards. It would appear that, given a big enough investment in buying tickets, it is possible to work out a way of making a profit on betting on pre-printed tickets. It is not supposed to be possible for punters who choose their own numbers to devise any system whereby they can correctly anticipate the draw.

This assumption however was challenged by illusionist Derren Brown (see **FT185:28-32**) when a live television show broadcast in September 2009 appeared to show him predicting that night's lottery draw. It left viewers guessing. Had he, by sleight of hand, written down the winning numbers just after the draw was made? Was the whole programme an elaborate hoax? Or had he, as he hinted, used a method of prediction he called 'the wisdom of crowds', harnessing the hidden psychic powers of members of the public? Camelot congratulated Brown on his 'illusion', reassuring viewers that it was "impossible to affect the outcome of the draw".

Some punters, however, are convinced that draws *can* be predicted by studying past results to see which numbers have not been drawn for a while and are due. Sadly, this is false mathematics, but is encouraged by Camelot, who publish up-to-date lists of 'overdue' numbers. Many punters apparently choose their numbers on this basis. At one stage, one number remained undrawn for almost a year. But just because, say, 16, has not been drawn in a long while there is no grounds to suppose it has a higher chance of being drawn soon. Every draw is unique and independent of the one before. Psychologist Dr Kevin Bennett describes what he calls the 'gambler's fallacy'.

"If you buy four scratch-off tickets and

lose all four, this does not mean that you are 'due' to win on the fifth. Unfortunately, many people mistakenly believe that lottery tickets are interrelated. Roulette wheels at casinos exploit this by providing a history of the last 20 or so spins. If the roulette wheel landed the past 10 spins on red does that mean that red is 'hot'? Or that black is 'due'? The truth is neither: Each spin is completely independent of the previous. The wheel has no memory." And neither do Lottery machines, although Camelot gives its machines Arthurian names such as Guinevere, Lancelot and Merlin to suggest they have characters and perhaps that somehow there is a 'magic' involved.

While some players have elaborate ways of choosing numbers, relying on such things as their age or significant dates, many choose their numbers the lazy way. They might simply choose the middle column of the numbers as printed on the ticket; this is the explanation, it is believed, for the extraordinary day when 133 players shared the prize. Or they might choose simple mathematical sequences of numbers that are based on old-fashioned superstition. There was one Lotto draw which failed to produce a jackpot winner but, astonishingly, 4,082 players guessed five of the six winning numbers (7, 14, 21, 35, 41, 42). The number 7 is considered lucky and five of the six numbers were multiples of 7. Had the 41 been a 28, in all probability, those 4,082 players would have shared the big prize. There is also the case of a lottery game where the organisers expected four or five winners, but 110 claimed the money. Fraud was suspected and officials investigated, only to discover that the punters had based their predictions on numbers found on a brand of fortune cookies.

Mathematics can be called upon to explain some of the odd sequences and coincidences that have emerged from the world's lottery games. The strange matter of the Bulgarian lottery is a case in point. Professor David J Hand, a statistician from Imperial College,

London, has devised the 'improbability principle' to explain why coincidences and rare events happen so often. When the Bulgarian lottery randomly selected numbers 4, 15, 23, 24, 35 and 42 twice within four days of each other, it was not a 'freak' result as the organisers described it, but an example of the principle in action. "First, many lotteries are conducted around the world. Second, they occur time after time, year in and year out. This rapidly adds up to a large number of opportunities for lottery numbers to repeat. And third, the law of combinations comes into effect: each time a lottery result is drawn, it could contain the same numbers as produced in any of the previous draws." A simple example of this law at work is that of how many people would need to be in the same room for there to be a 50:50 chance that two of them have the same birthday. The answer is 23. In the case of a lottery, 4,404 draws would be needed so that the probability of drawing the same six numbers twice was greater than 50 per cent.

If two draws occur each week, making 104 in a year, this number of draws will take less than 43 years. That means that after 43 years, it is more likely than not that some of the sets of six numbers drawn by the lottery machine will have matched exactly. That puts a rather different complexion on the Bulgarian spokeswoman's comment that it was a freak coincidence. And given that there are a number of lotteries being organised around the world that require players to choose six numbers, it is surprising such apparent coincidences do not happen more often somewhere in the world.

However, if one does win the lottery, it is easy to believe that whatever system one used to pick the numbers must have worked. Or are there some people, like the Croatian music teacher Frane Selak, who are born lucky? In a long life (see **FT176:12, 264:10, 309:5**), he survived a train accident that killed 17 passengers, a plane accident in which 19 people died, a bus crash which resulted in four fatalities, and an incident in which he drove his car over a cliff to be saved from death by a well-placed tree. In 2003 he won more than £700,000 in the Croatian lottery.

But do you really want to be a millionaire? William 'Bud' Post wished he had never won \$16 million in the Pennsylvania lottery. It was a total nightmare, he admitted before he died. When news of his new wealth became known he was successfully sued by a former girlfriend and his brother allegedly hired a hit man to kill him so as to inherit the fortune. The 'lucky' winner lost substantial sums in two failed businesses and within a year was \$1 million in debt.

♦ **TED HARRISON** is a writer, artist and filmmaker. A former BBC religious affairs correspondent, he is a regular contributor to *FT*.



LAND OF THE RISING RIGHT

SD TUCKER explores rising political extremism in Japan, finding a once-proud nation whose growing global impotence begs the question of whether or not the Japanese race itself is slowly dying.

On standard maps of the world, Japan appears very much on the far right – appropriately enough, given the recent rise in nationalist sentiment amongst the country’s politicians. Take Japan’s former Interior Minister, Sanae Takaichi, who in 2014 was caught out admitting her deep admiration for the political philosophy of that noted democrat, Adolf Hitler. Twenty-year-old photos had emerged of her promoting a highly misguided 1994 self-help book aimed at aspiring politicians entitled *The Hitler Election Strategy: A Bible for Certain Victory in Modern Elections*. The book, filled with manga-like cartoons of a friendly Führer and direct quotes from *Mein Kampf*, advised wannabe-MPs to imitate Adolf by “wiping out voters who cannot be persuaded”, a step the book’s author, Yoshio Ogai, was at pains to point out “does not mean to kill them.” Instead, unspecified “measures” should be taken to “block their political activities”. Ms Takaichi took note of such wisdom, appearing in magazine ads for the book shortly after release and gushing praise effusively: “As the author [and indeed Hitler himself] points out, the key to victory is a ‘strong will’,” she swooned. “With love and a vision for the nation and the homeland, let’s meet the challenge, youngsters!”

The 1994 book’s author had been a spin-doctor of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Japan’s most successful post-war party of governance, to which Takaichi herself now belongs. Whilst hardly genocidal maniacs, various LDP big-wigs have nonetheless managed carelessly to give the impression they just might be mild fellow-travellers of the brownshirt cause. Finance Minister and one-time LDP PM Taro Aso was exposed in 2017 as saying that, whilst Hitler was “no good” overall, his basic “motive was right”, whilst in 2013 Aso had advised the LDP should alter Japan’s constitution by stealth, “doing it quietly” behind voters’ backs, just as the Nazis had done when subverting the German constitution for their own evil ends. “I want to make it clear the Cabinet will never view the Nazi government positively,” an LDP spokesman was later forced to clarify, but if your party ever feels the need to have to clarify such a thing in the first place, this may be an indication it is doing something slightly wrong. However, back in 2001, Taro Aso himself had generously declared he wanted Japan

to become the kind of successful nation in which even “the richest Jews would want to live”, so they *can’t* have been a bunch of Hitlerites, can they? ¹ Another figure whose decrees have carried unfortunate echoes of Japan’s Nazi-allied past is Yoshihide Suga, LDP Chief Cabinet Secretary, whose 2015 appeal to the nation’s women to “please have many children” was interpreted as a nod to the wartime leadership’s encouragement of a high birth-rate to provide new cannon-fodder for the expansionist Japanese Empire. Suga’s words could have been worse; in 2003 future Agriculture Minister Seiichi Ota had suggested rape as a potential solution to the country’s famously low contemporary birth-rate during a seminar. “Gang-rape shows the people who do it are still vigorous and that is OK,” he daringly ventured. “I think that might make them close to normal.” “I know I’ll get into trouble for saying that!” Ota allegedly then added – and he was right, he did. ²

SAMURAI SPIRITS

The problem may be related to Nippon Kaigi (NK), or ‘Japan Conference’, an electorally influential ultranationalist body of which around 60% of current Japanese MPs are members. NK is actively neo-

Imperialist in tone, wishing for Japan’s constitution to revert to that of days of old, so that the population become redefined as duty-bearing Imperial subjects of the Emperor, not rights-bearing free citizens. Japan’s current LDP PM Shinzo Abe is very NK-friendly. A committed patriot, Abe ordered all school textbooks to downplay “masochistic” details about his countrymen’s many past military atrocities, one of NK’s most cherished goals. Abe is the grandson of previous hard-right Japanese PM Nobosuke Kishi, detained by US forces as an abuser of slave-labour during his former role as Imperial Munitions Minister, a kind of Japanese Albert Speer. Becoming PM in 1957, Kishi was forgiven by Washington due to his virulent anti-Communist views, and in 1960 had tried to implement laws enabling Japan to rebuild its armed forces, before peacenik public protests forced him from office. Critics have alleged Abe wishes to finish what his honourable ancestor started, especially since his 2017 calling of a snap general election upon the grounds that Japan needed to reform its weedy pacifist constitution in the face of recent North Korean threats to engulf the country in “nuclear clouds”. ³ In 2019, under Abe’s leadership, Japan entered into a literal new



ABOVE: A man wearing an Imperial Army uniform visits the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo on 15 August 2019.

TOMOHIRO OHSUMI / GETTY IMAGES

KOICHI KAMOSHIDA / GETTY IMAGES



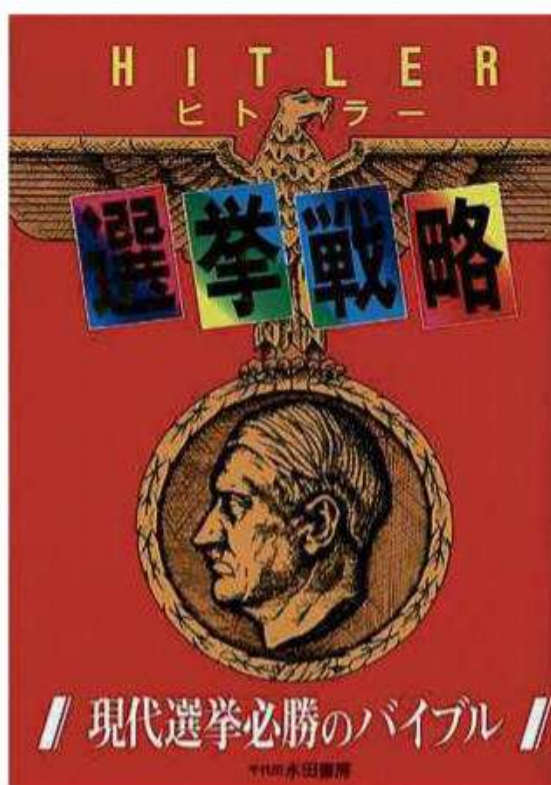
TORU YAMANAKA / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: Minister of Internal Affairs Sanae Takaichi is possibly slightly embarrassed by her early enthusiasm for *The Hitler Election Strategy: A Bible for Certain Victory in Modern Elections* (below). **ABOVE RIGHT:** A Shinto priest leads Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe as he visits the controversial Yasukuni war shrine in Tokyo in 2013.

age of statesmanship – that of the ‘Reiwa Era’, which began on 1 May with Emperor Akihito’s abdication on grounds of old age, prior to Crown Prince Naruhito’s full succession to the Chrysanthemum Throne in October. Every Emperor’s reign has an era-name, or *gengo*, chosen to set the tone for the years ahead. According to Abe, *Reiwa* means ‘beautiful harmony’, suggesting “a culture born and nurtured as people’s hearts are beautifully drawn together”, but the word is ambiguous, with others suggesting it really means ‘it is beautiful to obey orders’, as *kamikaze* pilots were told prior to becoming human suicide-bombs. Akihito’s own *gengo*, the ‘Heisei Era’, unequivocally meant ‘achieving peace everywhere’, but is this aim now outdated? Year One of Heisei came in 1989, with a booming Japan of Nissan and Sony perhaps set to become the world’s top economy; by Year Thirty-One, its demographics had aged as badly as Akihito himself, and the nation’s GDP had humiliatingly been overtaken by China’s, a land it had once seemed poised to conquer. ⁴

In 2013, Abe made the first Prime Ministerial visit to Tokyo’s controversial Yasukuni war-shrine for seven years, causing a dive in diplomatic relations with Japan’s former adversaries, China and Korea. The shrine is contentious as it is a giant spiritual storage-depot for the souls of Japan’s war-dead – including no fewer than 1,068 acknowledged war-criminals, with 14 Class-A examples being secretly enshrined there by rebel Shinto priests in 1978, including war-time PM General Hideki Tojo. Maybe Abe was just visiting his grandad’s old friends? Following election victory in 2012, Abe made straight for Kishi’s tomb to promise

AN OUTRAGED NATIONALIST CHOPPED OFF HIS FINGER



the old man’s soul he would honour a sworn vow to renew the military and “recover the true independence” of Japan. Previous PMs’ visits to Yasukuni have provoked mobs to chop off their fingertips in rallies of choreographed outrage, although when Abe failed to pay respects there during a brief

initial term as PM in 2006/07, an outraged nationalist sliced his own finger off and mailed it to Abe anyway. Latest census-data shows there are currently 2,466,532 ghosts stationed within Yasukuni, serving as a ‘divine shield’ for the Emperor’s eternal protection, whether they want to or not. Some spectral soldiers were forced foreign conscripts, but Japanese courts have ruled their families have no right to release them as this would endanger Shintoists’ ‘freedom of religion’. Even some living former soldiers, declared dead by mistake, have been refused permission to lay down arms; at least they know what fate awaits them after death. Proposals have been made to exorcise war-criminals from amongst the less culpable rank-and-file to defuse the issue, but Yasukuni’s priests maintain this would be as impossible as extracting a specific individual drop of water from a lake. The priests may not help even if they could. Yasukuni’s affiliated museum glorifies Japan’s war-aims as a noble battle against white colonialism, much like Abe’s sanitised school textbooks. As such, Abe’s 2013 visit – wrongly billed as an annual “report before the souls of the war-dead” – was widely seen as a belligerent move. Following diplomatic disquiet, Dishonest Abe has since stayed away from Yasukuni, but is careful to send ritual offerings twice a year, and dispatches other LDP politicians to pay obeisance in his stead to keep the angry dead quiet. Once elected, Abe consistently delayed moving into his official Tokyo residence, which is itself supposedly haunted by Japan’s bloody past; in 1932, naval officers assassinated another PM there, and it is rumoured Abe is scared of the ghostly rebels’ continued



STRANGE STATESMEN #34

presence. In 2013, an opposition MP filed a question demanding to know if this was true. Abe denied it, but some refused to believe him.⁵

DEDICATED FOLLOWER OF FASCISM

Come election-time, Japan has a tradition of *seikenhousou*, short speeches performed direct-to-camera by each candidate and shown on national TV. The idea is admirable, but undoubtedly gives people way more extreme than Abe a platform to disseminate their views. Such was the case with the 2007 *seikenhousou* of a self-proclaimed revolutionary fascist named Koichi Toyama, running for Governor of Tokyo. The shaven-headed and black-garbed activist had a most unusual line in electoral patter. Edited highlights of his speech would run thus: “Gentlemen! This nation is horrible! I have no interest whatsoever in political reform... This nation must be destroyed! I do not have a single constructive proposal! The only thing we must do now is... annihilate everything that exists! Gentlemen! I despise



“WE HAVE ONLY ONE OPTION LEFT – TO OBLITERATE THIS NATION!”

each and every one of you... A fucked-up nation like this... has no other option but to be destroyed... THERE IS NO HOPE!!... We have only one option left... TO OBLITERATE THIS NATION!!... [If you would like to help me do so, then] please give me a phone call. I do not care if you are under-age... I have one [final] thing to state... If I get elected... ‘They’ will be terrified. I myself will be terrified!” Then, giving an ‘up yours!’ sign to the camera, Toyama leant back to await the revolution. It never came, but he gained some 15,059 votes from concerned citizens who agreed Japan was now so worthless that it needed to be utterly wiped from the face of the Earth.⁶

To an outsider this epidemic of self-loathing may seem strange, but from a Japanese viewpoint, the situation can appear somewhat different. Whilst an enviably rich, safe, cohesive and well-developed nation, Japan’s economy has been stagnating for two decades now, and its low birth rate means it is busily committing demographic suicide; the population may drop from 127 million today to 87 million in 2060, 40 per cent of whom will be pensioners. With about 25 per cent of the population already over 60, more nappies are sold for loose-bowelled old people than for babies in Japan, an embarrassing symbol of the decline in national virility. Finance Minister Taro Aso – who is *definitely not* a Nazi, remember – has suggested the best solution might be for elderly “tube people” in hospitals to “hurry up and die”, but given Japan’s large number of wrinkly voters, it seems no state-sponsored programme of forcible euthanasia can be adopted. A 2009 news story in which a lonely young man married a female videogame character from the creepy dating-simulation title *Love Plus* on his Nintendo DS instead of settling down with a real female and starting a real family with real children, drew much domestic comment, wondering how matters had come to such a pretty pass.⁷ One commonly proposed answer could be summed up in a single word: *America!*

JAPAN: BORN IN THE USA

Japan’s relationship with America is long and complex. Beginning in the 1630s Japan underwent a long period of self-imposed isolation, known as the *Sakoku* or ‘closed country’ era, when ordinary Japanese were forbidden to travel abroad upon pain of death. However, in 1853 Commodore Matthew Perry of the US Navy forced his way into Edo harbour, fired off warning shots from the advanced artillery of his fleet, and demanded Japan open its ports to American trade. Two centuries of seclusion had left Japan’s military hopelessly antiquated, with no option but to agree. Disgraced, the Japanese aimed to imitate their new Western masters, reinventing the native Shinto religion as a nationalist creed and claiming their Emperor as a living embodiment of the Sun. United behind this holy half-



TOP: Revolutionary fascist Koichi Toyama gives Japan the finger during his televised 2007 election pitch (or *seikenhousou*). ABOVE: Members of a far right group parade at the entrance of the Yasukuni shrine on 15 August 2019.

CHARLY TRIBALLEAU / AFP / GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE LEFT: Madoka Kitamura, chairman of the Japan Sanitary Equipment Industry Association, shows off new unified signage intended to demystify the many and various functions of Japan's hi-tech toilets. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Kakoto Tonami (aka 'Mac Akasaka') does the Smile Dance.

human deity, a sense of *kokutai*, or sacred national identity, was encouraged which led ultimately to the disaster of WWII, when Japan sought to show America that the pupil could now outwit his teacher. Atom-bombs proved them wrong, and when US General Douglas MacArthur flew in to run the country in the role of benign dictator, he made sure he brought along the flag from Commodore Perry's old ship to ram American victory home. MacArthur made deliberate attempts to destroy the *kokutai*, banning samurai films in favour of Hollywood and promoting alien leisure activities like baseball. Deeming the Japanese "children", MacArthur ensured they would remain forever attached to their adoptive mother's apron-strings, introducing a new constitution banning Japan's legal right to wage war. For the world's first officially pacifist nation, the price to be paid was Japan's total dependence upon America to defend it – as one Japanese PM put it, his country was now nothing but an "unsinkable aircraft carrier" for Uncle Sam, a real-life Airstrip One. Politically and economically speaking, Japan today is utterly westernised, but also largely impotent in a geopolitical sense, something some have tried to link to the nation's low birth rate and sense of general malaise. In 1976, a brave Japanese porn-star dressed up as a *kamikaze* pilot and crashed his light aircraft into the home of a scandal-rocked Tokyo businessman in protest at the degenerate capitalist state his country had become; if even porn-stars are feeling impotent, you know something is not right. ⁸

The position of those who object to such cultural colonisation was summed up in another *seikenhousou* released by the revolutionary fascist Koichi Toyama in

2008, in which he unexpectedly put himself forward as a candidate in that year's US presidential elections. At first, this sounded hypocritical. However, if you obey Toyama's stern command to "Hear me!" you will realise he is simply making a standard anti-American point to the effect that, since Japan has more-or-less become a '51st State' of the USA, he should really be given a say in who the next President should be. ⁹ Posting a video on YouTube is hardly the same thing as turning *kamikaze* in protest at the status quo, however, and seems symbolic of the way that exposure to a US-style consumer society has weakened the once-steely Japanese character. Even the supposedly hard-line Shinzo Abe has been forced to make concessions to the weakling tendencies of his modern-day electorate by appointing an official 'Minister for Toilets' to pander to the needs of their pampered posteriors. Since the 1980s, hi-tech toilets which wash people's bums with soapy water and come with heated seats and multi-functional electronic control-panels fitted have been *de rigeur* in Japan, with slogans like 'Don't Let People Say Behind Your Back That You Have a Dirty Bottom!' fuelling a spike in sales. However, many public toilets are less luxurious, so Abe declared being able to have a comfortable poo when out and about to be a profound and important human right, guaranteed in law. A government manifesto pronounced that restful defecation was a fundamental aspect of "the dignity of a human being", which "greatly affects quality of life". As such, Abe recast his Women's Minister, Haruko Arimura, as Japan's new Toilet Minister and tasked her with creating a 'Japan Toilet Challenge', which would enable local authorities to fund

the cost of these £1,000-plus super-loos by covering them with paid-for advertising. ¹⁰

Another deplorable manifestation of the softening of the Japanese soul comes in the activities of Makoto Tonami, or 'Mac Akasaka' as he calls himself, founder of the Smile Party. Akasaka spent 25 years as a *salaryman*, making millions in trade before retiring to try his hand at politics. His main policy is to try and lower Japan's notoriously high suicide rate by acting like an out-of-work children's entertainer trying desperately to drum up new business. The inventor of a self-help creed called 'Smile Therapy', Akasaka runs repeatedly for any office going, making memorably silly *seikenhousou* in which he teaches viewers his trademark 'Smile Dance' technique whilst dressed in a series of infantile costumes, from Superman to Mahatma Gandhi to a silver-suited space-alien. He says performing his dance will help avert depression, calling for it to be made compulsory in Japanese schools and workplaces.

Predictably, Akasaka's antics have had little effect upon Japan's suicide rate, although they have motivated several people to try and kill *him*; during campaigns he appears in fancy-dress on Tokyo street-corners, singing and dancing, performances which have been disrupted by disgusted passers-by spitting on him, throwing rocks, and making threats of violence. Nonetheless, in April 2019 Akasaka finally managed to bag himself an Assembly Seat in Tokyo's Minato Ward after promising to pay local students and over-65s a monthly allowance of 30,000 Yen each, an idea which will certainly bring a smile to their faces if he actually manages to put it into practice. ¹¹



TORU YAMANAKA / AFP / GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE: Former Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama's wife Miyuki cooks up a cosmic storm during a Thai cooking class for the spouses of leaders attending the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in 2009.

LEADERS' WIVES

Probably the ultimate symbol of contemporary Japan's capitulation to decadent Western nonsense came in 2009 when Yukio Hatoyama became PM, bringing with him a curious First Lady named Miyuki. A former stage-dancer, Miyuki spent much of her earlier life in the United States, where she clearly picked up some of the New Age lingo. Quite apart from penning 'cosmic' cookbooks with titles like *Miyuki Hatoyama's Hawaiian Spiritual Food*, she also contributed to a 2008 publication, *Very Strange Things I've Encountered*, where she revealed her soul had been abducted by aliens one night during the 1980s and taken to Venus in a "triangular-shaped UFO." Apparently Venus was "very green" – as was she in opening her husband up to ridicule like this; the PM was already nicknamed 'ET the Alien' because of his large, protuberant eyes and strange personal manner. Then, Miyuki went on TV and claimed to have known Tom Cruise during a previous life, back when he was (apparently) Japanese, and declared it her ambition to make an Oscar-winning film with him. She also did the Moonwalk during the election campaign, and appeared in public wearing home-made items of clothing fashioned from bags of coffee. Styling herself as a "life composer", she soon took charge of her husband's public image, with unfortunate results; when he began donning absurdly camp outfits like a white shirt covered in red love-hearts paired nattily with a pink blazer, conservative critics labelled the PM a national disgrace. Forced to defend his wife's influence, he rather ungallantly described her as being an excellent "energy-refuelling base" for him whenever ET had to phone home. How did Miyuki recharge *her* batteries, though? Apparently, she did so by partaking of daily 'solar breakfasts'.

SHE REVEALED HER SOUL HAD BEEN ABDUCTED BY ALIENS

"I eat the Sun," Miyuki told Japanese journos, whilst reaching into the sky and pretending to tear bits off the celestial object and put them into her mouth. "Like this: yum, yum, yum. It gives me enormous energy. My husband has recently started doing that too." If so, then to no avail; Yukio Hatoyama was ejected from office in under a year.¹²

Even worse than inhabiting a bad photocopy of Middle America, some Japanese are now living in a neon-hued oriental simulacrum of California. Instead of worshipping the rising Sun in the embodied form of the Noble Emperor, the nation's First Lady was pretending to eat it like a New Age idiot. Was the harsh traditional samurai culture of Old Nippon doomed forever? Not necessarily – for as we shall see next issue, in 1997 a most unexpected Saviour returned to Earth and landed in central Tokyo, offering salvation through the ballot-box.

NOTES

1 *Times*, 22 Oct 2014; www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/09/neo-nazi-photos-pose-headache-for-shinzo-abe; www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/30/japan-minister-tara-aso-praises-hitler-right-right-motives; www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-23527300; www.theguardian.com/world/2008/sep/19/japan; Takaichi's office later said she "could not remember" having made this endorsement of Hitler's election strategies.

2 www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/30/

japanese-politician-yoshihide-suge-in-sexism-row-after-call-for-women-to-have-more-babies; news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/3025240.stm

3 *Times*, 8 Apr 2015; *Sunday Times*, 8 Oct 2017; www.wsj.com/articles/for-japans-shinzo-abe-unfinished-family-business-1418354470; Abe sat on Kishi's knee listening to pacifist protestors call for his head, and has said that criticism of his grandfather's wartime role was what led him to become a conservative in the first place.

4 www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-47769566; <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-japan-emperor-calendar/whats-in-a-name-japan-puzzles-over-reiwa-the-term-for-new-imperial-era-idUKKCN1REOL2>; www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/04/03/national/japan-assures-world-reiwa-beautiful-harmony-nothing-command/; www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-emperor-era-explainer/explainer-japan-new-imperial-era-name-reiwa-origins-selection-meaning-idUSKCN1RD186; www.newstatesman.com/world/asia/2019/05/shinzo-abe-and-rise-japanese-nationalism; Declining use of the Imperial Calendar system is indicative of Japan's increasing westernisation; in 1975 82% of the population used mainly *gengo* to track what year it was, but by 2019 this had fallen to 34%. Government bodies tend to use the *gengo* system, thanks to a law passed by conservatives in 1979, but most companies prefer using the Western model to facilitate ease of trade, which is itself very telling.

5 *Times*, 30 Oct 2014; news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/1488305.stm; www.economist.com/news/essays/en/asia-second-world-war-ghosts; www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/19/japan-prime-minister-official-residence-haunted

6 www.youtube.com/watch?v=df7Jd6HclY

7 www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16787538; www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/adult-nappies-outright-baby-nappies-4706474; www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/22/elderly-hurry-up-die-japanese; www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/howaboutthat/6718706/Japanese-man-marries-computer-game-character.html

8 Compiled from Ian Buruma, *Inventing Japan: From Empire to Economic Miracle, 1853-1964*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003, especially pp.1-2, 12-13, 42, 89-92, 107-111, 118, 126, 139, 141, 144, 151.

9 www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGZqOkeYbB0

10 *Times*, 27 May 2015

11 www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/01/04/national/mac-who-would-be-governor-says-smile/#.VsxEV2pFDcs; www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/04/22/national/politics-diplomacy/cosplaying-eccentric-mac-akasaka-smile-party-snags-seat-tokyo-ward-assembly/#.Wp-7SeRfIU; for instructions how to perform the Smile Dance, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Mzotoy6lqs and go towards the end of the video; for footage of Akasaka dressed in his various costumes, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBzzMuFkNas

12 www.theguardian.com/world/2009/sep/03/miyuki-hatoyama-japan; news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/8258626.stm; news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/8684107.stm; Miyuki should really have married Tokuo Moriwaki, longtime head of Japan's UFO Party, who spent years campaigning for the government to build a saucer landing-strip on Japan's western coast. Or, as a promoter of 'spiritual food', she could have stood for The Vinegar Lovers' Party, a 1980s outfit promising extreme longevity through the mere consumption of vinegar – it used the fact most of its candidates were elderly as proof positive its panacea worked.

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Stir it up

LISA GLEDHILL finds that a seasonal reminder from the pulpit is by no means a half-baked idea...

“**S**tir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people,” begins the traditional text for the last Sunday before advent in the Book of Common Prayer,¹ and for generations it’s been a handy reminder to practically-minded Anglicans to get stirring with the Christmas pudding.

The day – which this year falls on 24 November – has been known as Stir-Up Sunday since at least the 1830s and it’s the first in the series of festivities that keep us entertained through the dark days until Twelfth Night. In the words of a once-popular rhyme: “Stir up we beseech thee, the pudding in the pot, and when we get home, we’ll eat it all hot.”²

A rich dish laden with dried fruits and expensive spices has been a Christmas highlight since the 15th century, evolving gradually from a meaty stew to the firmer, sweeter, boiled suet duff we know today.³ It’s hardly surprising that such a special sticky pud has gathered a bit of folklore along the way.

Like most of our Christmas traditions, the rituals of the pudding seem to have reached their peak in the second half of the 19th century. On Stir-Up Sunday, each member of the household, including children and servants, has to take a turn stirring the mixture (sometimes widdershins) while making a wish.

During stirring, tokens are added to the mix for a fortune-telling game when the pudding is served. At its simplest, a small silver coin is tossed in and the person who finds it in their portion is guaranteed good fortune in the coming year. Sometimes several coins are



Tokens are added to the mix for a fortune-telling game

added to spread the luck around. Before decimalisation, sixpences or thrupenny bits were the most popular additions and many British households hung on to a few old coins after 1971 just to use at Christmas.

These days you can buy large, hygienic metal discs as a substitute for the traditional coins. They present less of a choking hazard but take away

the frisson of risk that used to spice up an old-fashioned family Christmas dinner.

Several other small items might also be added to the mix, such as a wedding ring to predict a marriage or a thimble for a spinster, although the range of objects and meanings have varied from place to place, and era to era. In 1676 Henry Teonge wrote: “We had a great cake in which was put a bean for the King, a pea for the Queen, a clove for a knave, a forked stick for the cuckold and a rag for the slut.”⁴

The Christmas pudding seems to have absorbed its fortune telling properties from the Twelfth Night cake, which was the main festive treat until the middle of the 18th century. This

cake traditionally contained a bean (or sometimes a small doll) and whoever found it became Lord of Misrule for the last night of the Christmas celebrations.

Twelfth Night cake customs continue in parts of Europe, Latin America and the USA but are generally a bit tamer than in the Middle Ages. Instead of turning the established social order upside down (for one night only) today’s successful ‘King of the Bean’ usually hosts or contributes to next year’s party.⁵

Christmas occupies the same part of the year as the Roman Saturnalia, a season of feasting when a person was chosen by lot to lead the revelry as King for a Day. Saturnalia survived much longer than many other pagan festivals – probably because it was so much fun – so it’s possible our Christmas traditions, including fortune telling by pudding (dessertomancy?) derive from the worship of Saturn.

On the other hand, just as convergent evolution ensures body-shapes and behaviours keep recurring to fill the same biological niches, maybe there’s a niche in the human psyche at deep midwinter that needs to be filled by spending time with loved ones, looking to the future, and eating lots of cake.

NOTES

1 “Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

2 John Brand, *Observations on the Popular Antiquities of Great Britain*, 1849

3 Alan Davidson, *Oxford Companion to Food*, 2nd edition, 2006.

4 Cited by Bridget Ann Henisch in *Cakes and Characters*, 1984.

5 Davidson, op. cit., 2006.

♦ **LISA GLEDHILL** is a film-maker and writer with a long-standing interest in forteana and puddings.

The Hong Kong conspiracy

CM SAUNDERS and CHEN MIN report from China on how the Government is turning the ongoing protests in Hong Kong to its own advantage

Unless you've been living under a proverbial rock, you can't fail to have noticed the growing concern regarding the Hong Kong protests which have presented president Xi Jinping with his biggest headache since coming to power in 2012. To date, there have been over 2,300 arrests; and amid the continuing chaos, claims and counter-claims of corruption and police brutality abound. Unsurprisingly, there has also been lots of finger-pointing, which has had some unexpected and far-reaching consequences.

It all began innocuously enough on 31 March when pro-democracy groups organised a march protesting the Fugitive Offenders Amendment Bill which, if enacted, would have allowed criminals to be extradited to territories including Taiwan and mainland China. The bill, triggered by Taiwan's pursuit of 20-year-old Hong Kong native Chan Tong-Kai, who murdered his pregnant girlfriend whilst holidaying in Taiwan in February 2018 before fleeing back to Hong Kong, was seen as an orchestrated attempt to undermine Hong Kong's autonomy. There were also other underlying issues, such as anger at rising property prices fuelled by wealthy mainland buyers and the influence of property magnate Li Ka-Shing, Asia's richest man, with an estimated personal fortune in excess of \$30 billion.

When the former British colony was handed back to China in 1997 it was done under



ABOVE: A man sits in the middle of a road in Hong Kong road to protest against the controversial extradition law proposal.

the proviso that it would retain partial autonomy for 50 years and keep an independent legal system; but many Hong Kong residents believe that China has been steadily eroding those privileges and are now demanding full democracy and the right to elect their own leaders. The much-lauded 'One country, two systems' claim was never going to work in practice; with Hong Kong's thirst for capitalism set against Beijing's conservatism and faux communist ideals, friction was inevitable.

To appease grumbling Hong Kongers, the extradition bill was redacted. After that, things were expected to die down. Instead, they quickly escalated and the first live rounds were fired on 1 October during China's National Week holiday to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the People's Republic, hospitalising an 18-year-old protestor. In the intervening months there were several cases of protestors being blinded by rubber bullets, and

It is an exercise in control and media manipulation

at least eight suicides linked to the protests. The first of these occurred on 15 June when 35-year-old Marco Leung Ling-kit climbed to the top of a shopping centre wearing a yellow raincoat with the words 'Brutal police are cold-blooded' and '[Chief Executive] Carrie Lam is killing Hong Kong' written in Chinese on the back. After a five-hour stand-off he jumped to his death.

In order to avoid detection, the protestors have adopted Black Bloc tactics, as well as Bruce Lee's advice to 'be water', another method of avoiding capture. When police arrive at the scene, the black-clad protestors immediately retreat, only to reappear somewhere else.

Intermittently since August, the massed ranks of the PLA (People's Liberation Army), including tanks and armoured vehicles, have been stationed just north of Hong Kong in Shenzhen. China maintains the military presence is part of an ongoing sequence of 'drills,' but the situation inevitably calls to mind echoes of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. The general consensus is that things won't escalate that far – not in a world of smart phones and the Internet. The Tiananmen Square Massacre has been virtually airbrushed from history in China, the official line being that there was a 'disturbance' and several dissidents were hurt. Even if sceptical Chinese netizens use a VPN to successfully circumnavigate the firewall, most will probably think reports of the massacre are simply malicious foreign lies, so successful has the Chinese programme of social conditioning been.

The primary aims of the state-controlled media have



always been to disseminate Party ideology and foster national pride and patriotism within the general populace. They do this, unashamedly, by nurturing an ‘us against them’ mentality: it’s China versus the world. Outwardly at least, Chinese people are happy with the status quo and grateful to the Ruling Party for sustaining it. Thus, whenever there is unrest it must be as a result of *heishou* (‘black hands’) or hostile foreign forces working behind the scenes.

The Chinese government are very much aware that the eyes of the world are upon them. If they make the wrong move, it could have disastrous consequences for a country that has come so far so fast. However, in recent years they have become expert spin doctors and, from this side of the red curtain at least, seem to have achieved the unthinkable by somehow managing to turn the Hong Kong controversy to their advantage. What began as an exercise in damage limitation is now an exercise in control and media manipulation extending to virtually every facet of society.

There has been simmering friction between China and the US for some time, starting with tensions in the South China Sea and bleeding into the ongoing trade war between the two countries. Consequently, within China there is a growing distrust of America and Americans, and it probably isn’t a coincidence that Beijing is laying the blame for the Hong Kong disturbances squarely at America’s door. In August, CCTV, China’s state broadcaster, described American political counsellor Judith Eadah as “the behind-the-scenes black hand creating chaos in Hong Kong”.¹ In the following days, *Ta Kung Pao*, a Hong Kong newspaper controlled by the Communist Party, published a photograph of Eadah standing in the lobby of a luxury hotel with a group of alleged protestors under the headline “Foreign Forces Intervene, Seek to Stir ‘Colour Revolution’”.

Beijing official Zhang Xiaoming then chimed in to say that the protests had “the

obvious characteristics of a colour revolution,” a reference to the uprising which started in Georgia in 2003 and led to pro-Western governments being installed in a number of former Soviet republics. The *Global Times*, a Beijing tabloid, added fuel to the fire by describing Eadah as a “so-called diplomat” who had previously worked in the Middle East “planning subversive activities”.

This appears to be a clear attempt to push the narrative that many of the Hong Kong protestors are terrorists with affiliations to the Middle East, further demonising them. Prior to the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, a meme appeared on both Western and Chinese social media platforms depicting an image of the twin towers with the words, ‘Anti-government fanatics are planning massive terror attacks in Hong Kong on September 11’.² It’s unclear where the meme originated, but the Chinese government are known to use these channels to further their agenda as they provide a direct link to the younger generation.

Several Chinese newspapers also published a photograph showing an unidentified foreign man sitting on some steps using his cell phone, describing him as a ‘foreign commander’ of the Hong Kong protest movement. It later emerged that the man was Kevin Roche, a journalist for the *New York Times*.

The above examples are typical of the subversive methods the Chinese media routinely employ, but elsewhere they can be far more explicit. In September, *China Daily*, the country’s biggest-selling English language newspaper, published an editorial stating: “The demonstrations in Hong Kong are not about rights or democracy. They are a result of foreign interference. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is an integral part of China and will remain so.”³

Strong words. The truly

remarkable thing is that these seemingly outlandish accusations may not be entirely without foundation. In an article titled ‘China tries to blame US for Hong Kong Protests’, the



Hudson Institute claim assertions that the US is helping pro-democracy protestors in Hong Kong are only “partially inaccurate”.⁴ In the article, Michael Pillsbury, a Senior Fellow and Director for Chinese Strategy, is quoted as saying:

“We have a large consulate there in charge of taking care of the Hong Kong Policy Act passed by Congress to insure democracy in Hong Kong, and we have also funded millions of dollars of programmes through the National Endowment for Democracy.”

The Hong Kong controversy is also having wider ramifications. On 4 October, Daryl Morey, General Manager of the NBA (National Basketball Association) franchise the Houston Rockets, caused a furore by tweeting an image to his approximately 200,000 followers which included the slogan “Fight for freedom. Stand with Hong Kong.” Big mistake. He was immediately swarmed by outraged Chinese Internet users (surprising, as Twitter is blocked in China) who spammed his account with the particularly unpleasant insult ‘Your mom is dead’. A data analysis of these comments revealed that many of them could have originated from bots.⁵

China is an extremely lucrative market for the NBA and the Houston Rockets were widely regarded as one of the most popular teams in the country through their links with Chinese legend Yao Ming, who used to play for them. Ming is now president of the CBA (Chinese Basketball Association), which, despite grovelling apologies from the NBA and Morey himself, promptly suspended its relationship with the Rockets. Chinese companies like sportswear brand Li-Ning and

SPD Bank then began pulling sponsorship.

What befell the Houston Rockets mirrors what has happened to countless other international brands in recent months. Actress Yang Mi, a vital component of Versace’s push for market prominence in Asia, severed ties with the company after it listed Hong Kong as a separate country on one of its T-shirts. Other companies including Givenchy, Samsung, Swarovski, Calvin Klein, Coach, and Taiwanese tea chain Yi Fang have all been forced to issue public apologies after invoking the fury of Chinese nationalists. Even Amazon has come under fire for selling T-shirts bearing the slogan ‘Free Hong Kong, Democracy Now’.

There have been unsubstantiated rumours that the Ruling Party itself may be behind the protests, using them as a tool to promote nationalism and further cement its dominance in the global marketplace. For instance, if Chinese basketball fans shun the Houston Rockets, and by extension the NBA, it’s entirely possible they might focus more on the emerging CBA. Where it will all end is anybody’s guess. While sending the tanks in might be out of the question this time, China is clearly using other means to control the situation. What is unfolding could literally be a case of the pen being mightier than the sword.

NOTES

¹ www.nytimes.com/2019/08/08/world/asia/hong-kong-black-hand.html

² www.supchina.com/2019/09/11/china-daily-conflates-hong-kong-protests-with-9-11-terrorist-attack/

³ <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201909/08/WS5d75046fa310cf3e3556a5a8.html>

⁴ <http://www.hudson.org/research/10714-china-tries-to-blame-us-for-hong-kong-protests>

⁵ <https://twitter.com/AirMovingDevice/status/1181120601643073536>

✦ CM SAUNDERS is a journalist and editor from south Wales who has lived off and on in China for over 12 years.

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Meandering through the megaliths

An alternative archaeological study of megalithic America flits between reasonable, highly speculative and totally doolally speculations, and the editing is sloppy. But the images are decent.

Spirits in Stone

The Secrets of Megalithic America

Glenn Kreisberg

Bear & Company 2018

Pb, 432pp, illus, refs, ind, \$25.00, ISBN 9781591431626

Graham Hancock's *America Before* suggests that America is "the key to the Earth's lost history". In *Spirits in Stone*, though it is not nearly as self-aggrandising, Kreisberg – an ardent Hancock fan – follows similar lines of 'evidence' and beliefs. Both meander through megalithic evidence.

Spirits is equally eclectic, and despite centering on piles of rocks and weird-looking natural outcrops "in the neglected backwoods of northeastern America", is not as tightly focused; however, it is the better and more enjoyable read.

Many of these megalithic piles lie appropriately around Woodstock and in other upper middle-class areas of New England, with much talk of Montauk, the start of the Hammonasett Line. (Is there possibly an overlooked Egyptian link here? Does the name Hammonasett contain two deities? This cannot be a coincidence surely, one God perhaps, but not two; the Great Pyramid of Giza makes it into the index, so all is not lost.)

Significantly, this very well illustrated book highlights the problem of random (or not!) stone cairns, anthropomorphic (rather than anthropogenic) outcrops, pareidolia and apparent (or real) astronomical alignments. For all the good that computing and star chart apps have done for prehistory, there is a tainted legacy in archæo-astronomy going back to the early 1960s and Gerald

Hawkins's multiple Stonehenge alignments. (It is astonishing to think that in those days major universities had a single computer, often an IBM704 that took up the top floor of an engineering department.) Now, with the advent of cheap sky-charting programs that allow date, time and location to be chosen, the heavens open and celestial-stone couplings can be explored (exploited? published?) at whim.

What did those heavens look like at nightfall on 22 October 2004BC? Bishop Ussher never knew, but all is revealed with a few strokes of the keyboard or a couple of voice commands. Let there be light, indeed; accompanying, praise-singing Angels from the Realms of Glory require an extra add-on.

The book has plenty of good, well printed, black and white photographs of cairns, erratics and outcrops and a pleasing cover. Arguably these will have and retain more value than the text.

It is sporting of the author to allow the reader to judge his claims of altars and alignments, of cat stones amongst bird stones and of turtle-cairns and serpent-walls. Many need the eye of faith or severe astigmatism, (though some of the turtle cairns look rather convincing) but, if Kreisberg can see them, others before him might also have had them in mind. But to appreciate some alignments, you need to be small, young and limber, a squat here, a fudge there and twisted back.

Cairns and cairn fields are the most problematical. The unwelcome explanation by malevolent (?) mainstream archæologists that they are European clearance cairns

"Truly, Jacquetta Hawkes is correct: 'every generation gets the Stonehenge it deserves'"

or boundary markers rather than "ceremonial vestiges of a long-lost culture" cannot be dismissed just because some heaps are configured 'roughly' like Ursa Major or the second-rate (at best) stars in the constellation Draco (Thurban or no) or are 'closely' aligned to the Winter Solstice sunrise–Summer Solstice sunset (the NNW–SSE Hammonasett Line).

A possible spiritual significance to the Winter Solstice sunset–Summer Solstice sunrise (as found in the Stonehenge principal alignment) seems within the realms of belief, but for the NNW–SSE is less so – and why overlook sunrise on the day after the Winter Solstice?

Stone piles and oddly-shaped glacial erratics are central to the book and presenting the raw data in a semi-objective way is of help (at the very least it proves the data are worth collecting).

It is informative to contrast Kreisberg's 'amateur' approach and interpretation with those of professionals such as Barnatt and Edmonds (*An Upland Biography: Landscape and Prehistory at Gardom's Edge*, 2017), who also faced with little more archæology than cairns, walls and natural and un-natural rock formations saw in them only prehistoric clearance cairns and stock walls.

The book's text is disturbing as it effortlessly moves from

reasonable to fairly extreme speculative to the clearly bonkers within three paragraphs, or between chapters, before returning to normality.

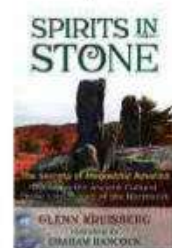
"Bluestones" (including perhaps the iconic 'small stones in the field, aka Stonehenge') are capable of "stripping negative ions from hydrogen electrons in water molecules" (where to begin!), this is likened to the Large Hadron Collider and its search for the 'God

Particle' (truly, Jacquetta Hawkes is correct: "every generation gets the Stonehenge it deserves or desires") and amazingly it is suggested that these "electromagnetic hotspots"

were used to help maize grow stronger.

There are also bizarre editing errors, figure 8.5 showing ley lines and captioned "a network of long-distance alignments in Great Britain" is of Crater Lake-Mount Shasta National Park in south Oregon. There must be a confusion in the meaning of BCE (or, if not, serious weirdness). "By 1000BCE the Norse had begun explorations of the Americas via Iceland, Greenland to Vinland." Both of these are from Chapter 7, probably the most outlandish of the book – though there are other strong contenders – as it documents Phœnicians, proto-Israelites, Norse and Welsh copper miners and Knight Templar treasure seekers all crossing the Atlantic, many leaving tablets of stone in the Catskill Mountains.

Non-mainstream science is not confined to the New World. Chapter 11, a translation of "[Pierre] Mereaux's classical work" on earthquake zones



Continued overleaf

Séance poodles

Propaganda from the council that wants to kill all visitors to appeal to Gen X paranoia

The Scarfolk Annual

Richard Littler

William Collins 2019
Hb, 136pp, illus, notes, £11.43, ISBN 9780008307011

Remember those comic annuals from your childhood that you're scared to reopen, just in case they're rubbish? Well, now you have a whole new reason to be scared of them. Born of misinformation blog *Scarfolk* (which runs spoof adverts for the fictitious 'Penguin Book of Handicapped and Disabled Jokes'), *The Scarfolk Annual* is a grisly pastiche of light reading.

Set in a universe where the Cold War is on loop, and where each page drops the reader into a netherworld of 1970s paranoia, *Scarfolk* explores a municipality in North West England: part new town, part concentration camp.

This is a region whose guide book claims to be written in psychotropic "cochineal-based inks", and features "mind-control and brainwashing techniques employed by agents of totalitarian regimes such as the Stasi".

Author Richard Littler, a writer and graphic designer, expertly sends up the alarmist literature that Generation X was required to absorb. Veiled threats are everywhere, from the "Welcome!" page which asks young readers to list their most valuable possessions, to the cut-out-and-keep Ouija boards.

Scarfolk Council makes no secret of the fact that it wants to kill all visitors. Rabies, happiness, and foreigners are the town's biggest concerns; fear is sown against all three through ludicrous printed facts, such as blaming the absence of white dogs' mess on overseas espionage.

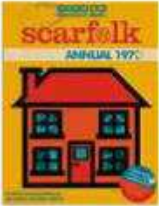
It all seems laughable, like UKIP did in the '90s, but Littler's knack for distorting British iconography has a chilling effect. The old BBC test card girl is reimagined as a night-hag scrawling "EAT PETS" on her blackboard. Children's games, meanwhile, include the noose-based Magic Justice Tree.

The flow of propaganda is occasionally broken up with bloodied fingerprints, and crossheads that seem straight out of a Radiohead inlay card ("Ignore the distressed person", "Trust may be lethal").

But it's in the artwork where the book truly hits its target. Scarfolk's pictograms show how inappropriate so many Callaghan-era public information campaigns were. Illustrations feature faceless children, and offer warnings against the "séance poodle", or instructions in how to fashion your own branding iron.

For anyone who wishes that Ladybird had produced a guide to MKUltra, *The Scarfolk Annual* is essential reading. "Foreigners inject witches' urine into their noses" could almost be a plausible headline in 2019, and Littler seems to have an infinite archive of source material. The theme park is going to be a gas.

George Bass
★★★★★



Continued from previous page

around Carnac is spectacular and – were it at all part of this world (it isn't) – revolutionary. Slightly less breathtaking is the interpretation of archæoacoustic studies of megalithic structures on the Maltese Islands. Modern archæoacoustics, the earthy rap-music to archæology's beat, is a fairly recent and an increasingly respectable sub-discipline/culture.

Although the claim that clapping hands on the top platform of the main pyramid at the Maya-Toltec site of Chichen Itza recreates the chirping of a manhandled Quetzal bird is clearly false, as nothing can be heard up there above the sound of panting of breath and the taking of selfies. Better to keep your ear to the ground and stick with less exotic bullroarers, as demonstrated in the West Kennet Long Barrow and discussed in Steve Marshall's book *Exploring Avebury*.

For all the talk of Hadron colliders, acoustic echoes and force fields the 17th century conceit of the Noble Savage has never really departed. For Kreisberg and his co-working tribe, he lies, wrapped in "sacred Native American Pan Appalachian cultural thought" in the woodlands or on the hill tops of Upper New York State, staring up at the stars... awaiting recognition.

Oh! Leave him in peace!

Rob Ixer
★★★★★

Memory Palaces and Masonic Lodges

Esoteric Secrets of the Art of Memory

Charles B Jameux, trans: Jon E Graham

Inner Traditions 2019
Pb, 112pp, illus, notes, bib, appx, ind, £12.99, ISBN 9781620557884

The author, once a member of Breton's Surrealists, was also Grand Chancellor of foreign relations for the Grand Lodge of France, and chief editor of its journal, *Initiatory Perspectives*.

While accepting modern Freemasonry's origins in Britain,

he contests the common view that locates the creation of speculative Masonry (as distinct from operative Masonry, a guild for stonemasons) in the early 18th century. Instead, he traces its earliest manifestations to Scotland 100 years earlier.

Whilst contemporary Freemasons meet at their Lodge, constructed expressly for this purpose, Jameux points out that the earliest speculative Masons were nomadic, meeting in the back rooms of pubs or other convenient places. As a result, the symbolic designs found in a modern Lodge (stone carvings, stained glass windows, tiled flooring, patterned carpets) would have been absent.

The 'tracing board', a portable wooden board bearing a painted illustration (depicting, for

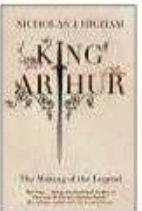
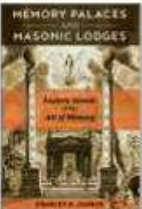
example, Solomon's Temple or Jacob's Ladder), is still employed in Masonic ritual, but would have had greater significance in those days of roaming Lodges. The initiate was instructed and taught Masonic doctrine by means of these symbolic images.

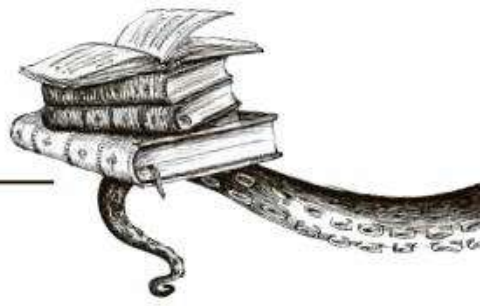
Jameux goes further, and demonstrates the influence of classical mnemonic

techniques (see Frances Yates's 1966 classic *The Art of Memory*) upon the early Scottish Masonic Schaw Statutes (1598–1599).

The classical 'theatre of memory' method employed by orators like Cicero had the speaker visualising the interior of a building, containing various objects or architectural features which, as aides-mémoires associated with particular points of the speech, acted as prompts. This technique was reworked by Giordano Bruno, so that instead of simply triggering the memory, the visualised images acted as talismanic objects, bestowing knowledge hitherto unknown to the seeker.

It is Jameux's contention that operative Masons were very much aware of this hermetic practice of visualisation, Bruno having visited Britain in the 1580s. He suggests they incorporated it into their own rituals, and that this was a catalyst for the subsequent transformation of operative Masonry to speculative. The second Schaw Statutes of 1599 specify that all Lodge





apprentices “tak tryall of ye airt of memorie and science yrof”.

The resurgence of interest in hieroglyphs during the Renaissance and the application of hieroglyphic writing to the art of memory was, he claims, a further influence on the development of Masonic ritual. If the realm of image is discernible by the contemplation of letters, with symbols concealed within words, then the secret passwords taught to Freemasons during ritual take on a new significance. Or rather, one could say that their original significance has been forgotten.

This is a slender little volume, with two appendices comprising over half its 112 pages. Nevertheless, it presents an intriguing thesis, of interest to both Brethren and the general reader.

Christopher Josiffe

★★★★★

King Arthur

The Making of a Legend

Nicholas J Higham

Yale University Press 2018

Pb, 380pp, ind, £20.00, ISBN 9780300210927

Recent decades have seen a slew of books claiming to locate Britain’s most legendary figure and his people in history, with theories placing Arthur in Devon and Cornwall, southern and northern Wales, borderlands Scotland, north east England, East Anglia, and the Thames Valley. This book by a Professor Emeritus in History, pushes back against these ‘positivist’ Arthurian histories, righting the excesses of those who would find connections to a historical Arthur in every hillfort and stone slab inscribed with a few significant letters.

First up to be examined are the various ‘foreign’ theories, starting with the notorious ‘Artorius’ inscriptions from Roman Dalmatia, going on to explore the potential for links between this Roman soldier and the Roman-period Sarmatians north of the Danube. The Nart sagas of the Caucasus are searched for material comparable to Arthur’s story, and names similar to Arthur and the tales in which they occur

from Ancient Greece. Any hope that potentially more promising Arthurian links to archæology from his homeland are dashed in the book’s second part, which takes a chronological look at all the British literary evidence for Arthur. If you don’t want to know the conclusions from this, if King Arthur was a genuine historical figure, then skip to the next paragraph... He wasn’t. Did you guess?

The journey’s more the thing, of course, and the one through this book, outlining the sources of some interesting origin theories, is very thorough indeed with not a sword-bearing stone left unturned. This is the only book needed to gain a picture of Arthur’s primary myth-makers, and their possible agendas and thought-processes behind the legend’s creation. If only it had followed through into the modern era where we have probably more theories and movies created in such a short time than ever. In choosing a modern straw man to demolish, the author picks only on Graham Philips’s theory of Avalon, asserting how its frailties “well illustrate the problems of all such recent ‘positivist’ Arthurian works”, an out-of-hand dismissal of the potentially valuable discoveries made by other general authors (Steve Blake, Scott Lloyd, Alan Wilson, Baram Blackett, Howard Reid, Alistair Moffat, etc.), while tenured investigators are afforded a closer view, all of them slain with the sword of academic agnosticism if they too could perceive an historical Arthur.

The calibre of literary research and discussion is first class. And yet something is missing, and not just the scant treatment of archæology.

A bigger question the book dares not to answer is: why does Arthur persist, what is the secret power of his legend? After such a thorough dissection of foreign theories that already on the face of it appear to skirt the outer edges of plausibility, the deflationary conclusion

ends on a sour note by harping on Arthur’s non-historicity, not coming to terms with and celebrating the endurance of his myth up to present times. Why write this book and not one about, say, Tristram, a figure who stands in both legend and British history?

Do we need any more books about the historic Arthur? Probably not. But then, did we ever? No amount of scholarship assuring us that none of it actually happened is going to change the unquenchable idea of Arthur and his people, or their symbols. Nor will it stop future discoveries from being made that will inevitably be linked with him, for his legends are a portal to the Dark Ages, and they embody so many fundamental truths and hopes, touchstones that are no less impactful for not being historic.

Jerry Glover

★★★★★

Life In Medieval Ireland

Witches, Spies and Stockholm Syndrome

Finbar Dwyer

New Island Books 2019

Pb, 232pp, £10.99, ISBN 9781848407404

This is a popular history of Norman Ireland covering the period between the late 12th and 14th centuries. It is a story of dispossession of the native Irish by arriving Norman colonists, of alliances, backstabbing, wars, famine and plague. There never was a truly peaceful period, as the Normans engaged in Civil War and Ireland was invaded by Edward Bruce. The dispossessed Gaels retreated to their mountain fastnesses but often emerged to slaughter the invaders and burn towns. But there is much of interest to forteans as well. We have feuding Franciscans killing each other in a fracas between Anglo-Norman and Gaelic Irish Friars at a meeting in Cork in 1291; maybe someone passed the mead the wrong way around the table. Fighting clerics were not unusual in Ireland at the

time as the Hospitaller Order in Dublin often sent warrior monks into the Wicklow mountains to subdue Irish raiders.

The Knights Templar were also powerful in Norman Ireland, controlling ports and access to inland waterways. Their immediate access to ships may have allowed some members of the Order to escape (with treasure no doubt) when they were suppressed in Ireland as no ships are listed among the items seized by Royal officials. The accused faced a panel of three Dominican and two Franciscan judges in a trial that lasted for six months. No verdict is recorded and the Templar Brothers were eventually released and given a stipend of two pence a day. Better than burning at the stake, as so many of their brethren did elsewhere.

Times of famine resulted in cases of cannibalism. In 1295 the poor of Dublin were reported to have eaten the bodies of executed prisoners.

On 27 June 1331 the people of Dublin were saved from starvation when several hundred whales beached themselves at the mouth of the Liffey. There are no reports of anyone trying to save the whales (other than salting down their remains).

Tales of witch trials usually resulted in the execution of servants rather than any person of status. Alice Kyteter who had four husbands die in suspicious circumstances came close to facing the gallows/stake, but connections saved her.

Heresy trials in some cases came about due to the marrying of old Gaelic beliefs with Christianity. A mythical Irish hero, Aedh Eanghach, would save the Irish, but he gained his powers from Mother Nature. A reaction to the Christian Church supporting the Norman invaders. For preaching such a creed, Adam Dubh O’Toole was burned at the stake in Dublin in 1328. The heresy continued to gain currency as two more men were burned at the stake in 1353 at Bunratty by order of the Bishop of Waterford.

An entertaining popular history based on surviving records rather than myths.

Páiric Ó Corráin

★★★★★



An alien in old Japan...

The intriguing tale of a female alien emerging from a bell-shaped hollow vessel combines Japanese folkloric elements with modern UFO tropes

The Mystery of Utsuro-Bune

Ancient UFO Encounter In Japan?

Shoichi Kamon

Flying Disk Press 2019

Pb, 184pp, illus, refs, \$15.00, ISBN 9781797793146

One 1987 *FT* article was memorable for breaking new ground. The Japanese ufologist Marasu Mori's 'The Female Alien in a Hollow Vessel', the story of an enigmatic young female who stepped out of a strange craft on Japan's north-east coast in February 1803 [**FT48:48-50**], was one of the most intriguing historical mysteries that we have published. This well-illustrated report by Kamon Shoichi presents the most complete investigation of the case yet.

The phrase *Utsuro-Bune* ('hollow ship') comes from the title of one of the main accounts in *Toen Shosetsu* by Bakin Takizawa (1767–1848), a well-known Edo period writer of historical novels. He had founded a regular meeting of intellectuals (*Toen-kai*, 'Rabbit Garden') – rather like Tolkien's 'Inklings' – to share "gossip, amusing news and strange tales". The 14 hand-written volumes of the *Toen Shosetsu*, which gathers their "presentations", was finally edited in 1928.

The Utsuro-Bune mystery – from volume 11 – has a number of distinct elements, many of which were notable for being unfamiliar to local people at that time. The 'ship' the girl arrived in was like a bell-shaped incense burner, with windows made of glass. The girl was young and pretty but foreign looking, as were her clothes. Her red hair had white streaks. Her language was unknown, as were the 'symbols' found in the ship. Despite her placid demeanour, she would allow no one to examine the box she was clutching.

According to Bakin, locals

speculated that she must have been the daughter of a rich or noble family and was punished for an illicit affair, cast adrift at the mercy of the elements and holding her executed lover's head in the box. These ideas were well-known elements of folk-tales and legends, and historical fiction, but probably formed the only reference available to the locals. I wish Kamon had gone further into this aspect.



A sceptical reader's first thought is that the Utsuro-Bune incident was a product of Bakin's literary imagination; but Kamon and his colleagues have found 12 historical and literary documents

which refer to it. The three main versions of the story include many small variations in details. These need a more detailed comparison.

Kamon has researched the place names involved, despite the way they were disguised in the various versions of the story. These chapters – with period maps and biographies of principal characters – have a strange fascination of their own, contributing to the sense of 'another place, another time', like a geography of 'fairyländ'. Likewise, Kamon's analysis of the different records of the strange symbols and written characters found in the 'craft'.

Given the importance of the debate, it is regrettable that Kamon has been seriously let down by his publisher. He does an excellent job of writing in English, but it seems no one has proof-read the book. The critical apparatus is minimal and chaotic in places, leaving me wishing for a proper list of references, a proper glossary, and certainly an index. I understand concerns over the budget, but too many of the illustrations are of faded black and white copies. Kamon's complex and detailed arguments could have benefited from a more linear arrangement.

To his credit, Kamon spends

considerable time examining critical objections to his main thesis: that the comparison with modern UFO crashes and encounters is so strong that he is convinced that Bakin's account of the Utsuro-Bune is based upon a memory of a real event. These objections, and his rebuttals, are scattered through the book and would have been better dealt with gathered in one place. He returns, too often, to the idea of similarity across the centuries between the depictions of the 'hollow vessel' itself and modern UFOs. I fear that that 'similarity' may be one of similarity only, not one of identity. Ship-like shapes, from any angle, from any century would have similarities with UFOs... if you only pick out ovoid UFO shapes to compare them with. There was nothing in the craft that suggested any propulsion system or indeed, flight controls. And nothing in any of Kamon's supplementary accounts that suggest a technology other than wood (a plank from the ship is on view in one temple), iron plates (on the hull) and glass (windows). I can't recall a modern case that compares directly with this, even though the story itself 'behaves' like a UFO story.

There is no doubt that this is the most complete collection of data on the Utsuro-Bune to date, and Kamon is to be congratulated on his endeavour, which he admits is unfinished. It is the interpretation that leaves one dissatisfied. On the presented evidence, it reads like a modern transmission of a 'meme'; Bakin's story passing into folk and literary memory, from where it is retold in new versions by different people. We can hope that Kamon will put aside his fixation with the UFO comparison and give us more about the different cultural, literary and folklore origins of this fascinating case in his promised expanded study.

Bob Rickard

★★★★★

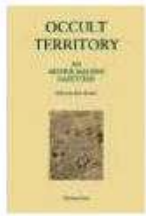
Occult Territory

An Arthur Machen Gazetteer

RB Russell, Ed.

Tartarus Press 2019

Hb, 232pp, illus, refs, ind, £35.00, ISBN 9781912586141



I could have done with a copy of this book 25 years ago when I went looking for some of the key locations in Arthur

Machen's early life armed with an OS map of Gwent and a copy of *Far Off Things*. While it was exciting to discover the Welsh master's boyhood home at Landewwi Fach Rectory and to follow the "chanting valley of the Soar" to Landegveth village, it would have been much easier had I been able to consult Ray Russell's excellent *Occult Territory: An Arthur Machen Gazetteer* (the title comes from a passage in *The Hill of Dreams*). This is a long-planned labour of love which will be welcomed by Machen readers interested in the links between locale and literature.

Divided into sections – Residences, Taverns, Temples and Miscellaneous – the book is a handy guide to the many places in which Machen lived, wrote, ate, drank and worshipped; it's also a kind of fragmentary biography mapping the varied and often peripatetic phases of the writer's life. Each entry is accompanied by a period photograph or drawing and by quotations taken from Machen's letters or memoirs that clarify when and why he could be found in a particular place and what mark it left on his writing.

The 'Temples' section reminds us that Machen was a lifelong churchgoer, if a rather unconventional one, while the preponderance of alehouses, restaurants and inns is equally instructive for those who might mistake him as simply a late, effete flower of the Decadent movement. While the Castell-y-bwch still serves pints beneath the "mystic tumulus" of Twmbarlwm and the Three Salmons does a brisk trade in Usk, it's sad to note how many of the London drinking spots frequented by Machen are no longer with us; happily, there are a number of still extant boozers listed here where one can raise a glass to his memory.

David Sutton

★★★★★



ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTEAN TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS...

The Great Pyramid Hoax
The Conspiracy to Conceal the
True History of Ancient Egypt

Scott Creighton

Bear & Co 2017

Pb, 208pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, \$16.00, ISBN 9781591437895

The Great Pyramid at Giza is one of the world’s great cultural symbols, yet – as Scott Creighton says – its origins are far from certain, as much about it remains a mystery. Professional Egyptologists have accepted that it was most likely constructed around 2550 BC, a date which relies on a single piece of evidence. This book is devoted to the study of that evidence – a crudely painted cartouche – which refers to the Fourth Dynasty king Khufu. Creighton systematically examines dozens of images of the cartouche, comparing it with others, concluding that it was faked. He points the finger at Colonel Howard Vyse, with evidence from excavation records and accounts by Vyse and his associates that seem to back him up. It is a dramatic detective story with an equally provocative conclusion with serious consequences for conventional knowledge. Creighton closes with a challenge to orthodox Egyptology to re-examine the Pyramid’s archaeological and cultural history.

Resonant Mind
Life Review in the Near-Death
Experience

David Lorimer

White Crow Books 2017

Pb, 269pp, bib, £16.99, ISBN 9781786770332

Among the many studies of near-death experiences (NDEs) – and David Lorimer has written some of the best – very little consideration has been given to the element or phase known as the ‘life review’ (see Fr Herbert Thurston, ‘Life Review’, **FT159:34-38**, June 2002). Here, with all his years of experience in NDE research, Lorimer dives deeply into this mysterious moral phenomenon. He examines the idea of ‘karma’ and other forms of “post-mortem judgement” and associated ideas of heaven and hell and compares

them to how they show up in narrated experiences of NDEs. It is hard to refute the idea that there is a universal (ie. non-religious) sense of moral order innate in all of us based on the examples Lorimer presents. This is obviously the ground from which religion sprouts. It suggests that religious context and iconography are purely cultural influences; i.e. a local vehicle for an underlying universal moral force.

In the Valleys of the
Noble Beyond
In Search of the Sasquatch

John Zada

Grove/Atlantic Monthly Press 2019

Pb, 300pp, refs, notes, \$26.00, ISBN 9780802129352

This is not the usual Bigfoot-hunting chronicle. It is more a portrait of a particular personification of the wilderness as seen through the eyes of wildlife hunters and guides, First Nation peoples and, yes, Bigfoot hunters as well; folk who spend most of their lives in that wilderness, in this case British Columbia’s Great Bear Rainforest on the Pacific Northwest coast. A writer, artist and photographer with an excellent eye for detail, Zada writes engagingly in the tradition of the best travel writers with genuine feeling for this anachronic humanoid symbol of a lost world.

Lost Knowledge of the
Imagination

Gary Lachman

Floris Books 2017

Pb, 161pp, notes, bib, ind, £20.95, ISBN 9781782504450

Gary Lachman’s erudition should be well known to readers of FT, who by now know what to expect from his books on the relationship between consciousness, culture and the Western esoteric tradition. His focus here is on the imagination, or rather that part of it which was occluded by the rise of rationalistic scientific materialism; a decline that began in the 17th century. To survive in today’s hectic world we now depend upon a variety of devices to augment our imagination and other important mental processes – processes once

served by powerful mnemonic techniques now lost to us. The ability to memorise, to manipulate in memory and imagination, to predict and create, to encapsulate complex and layered meanings in structured images, these were once the priceless abilities of mathematicians, storytellers, poets, artists, craftsmen, musicians, orators and others. Lachman shows us that not all is lost as he discovers the methods that created mental rigour; internal processes ranging from ‘memory palaces’ to intuitive and deductive tools in philosophy that, surprisingly, themselves became the basis for scientific practices. It may surprise many scientific types, for example, that one of the most complex expositions of pure logic was a poem by Parmenides about his imaginary journey to the Underworld. It is a subject that deserves Lachman’s intelligent discussion and he explains it perfectly.

Colin Wilson
Philosopher of Optimism

Brad Spurgeon

Michael Butterworth 2017

Pb, 119pp, £11.99, ISBN 9780955267208

This could have been entitled “a selection of the wit and wisdom of the late Colin Wilson”, a philosopher famous for his prolific introductions to the works of others who also compiled encyclopædic books on paranormal phenomena. This deceptively slender book is Spurgeon’s tribute to one he calls “the most important British writer of the 20th century”, sampling his writings on ‘mind, body and spirit’ movement, ‘phenomenology as a mystical discipline’, ‘levels of consciousness’, and ‘human energies’. The real gem is a long interview (in two parts) of Wilson by Spurgeon which provides a deep and fascinating insight into Wilson’s breadth of interest and his relentless pursuit of an understanding of what caused or drove anomalies of morality, behaviour and ‘peak’ experiences, positive as well as negative. It is curious how Wilson could be fascinated by the vilest acts of asocial psychopaths and yet manage to

write in such a cheerful manner. Despite dissecting what can go wrong with us, he was never less than optimistic that normality is about what goes right.

More Ghost Chronicles
Stories from the Realm of the
Unknown, the Unexplained, and
the Unbelievable

Maureen Wood and Ron Kolek

Weiser Books 2018

Pb, 230pp, \$16.95, ISBN 9781578636358

Pity the poor book that retails you stories that the front blurb, rather unfortunately, says are “unbelievable”. Narrated here are the adventures of “a skeptical ghost hunter and a medium” around Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Armed with thermal-imagers etc, they go in search of US Civil War ghosts, haunted houses, and unsettling happenings. The authors seem sincere in convincing themselves that they interact with “spirits”, but will it convince you? There are so many books of this kind now and, in total, they have added very little to our knowledge of things that can be passed on with any credibility.

Ancient Giants
History, Myth, and Scientific
Evidence from around the World

Xaviant Haze

Bear & Co 2018

Pb, 183pp, notes, ind, \$16.00, ISBN 9781591432937

Books about giants are a rarity; only a few came our way in the last decade. Haze is to be commended on producing this one for its two significant contributions. The first is that the 11 chapters that make up its core each deal with a single region (Britain, France and Spain, Italy and Germany, Russia, Greece and Malta, Biblical, Egypt and Levant, Africa, Antipodes, Asia, and India). The second part – which will be quite new to many of us – focuses on a “revealed” scroll, here called the *Book of Giants* and attributed to the Manichean prophet Mani, found “in a field” by a descendant of Noah. Haze provides sufficient background to make this sound quite interesting as a historic document on mythologic lore (whatever its provenance).

All you need to know about electric cars...



Hand-drawn text bubbles above the couple:

- How much will I save? £% /
- Are they expensive to insure?
- What's it like to drive? →
- How fast are they? ←
- How long will it take to charge?
- How much does it cost to run? !?

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Back to basics

Sarah Connor returns to kick all kinds of ass in a *Terminator* film that manages to avoid metal fatigue by erasing the post-Cameron sequels and getting back to what really matters



Terminator: Dark Fate

Dir Tim Miller, US 2019
On UK release from 23 October

For many, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* not only marked the peak of James Cameron's career, but became a pop-culture milestone that showcased the best of what action cinema can be thanks to its suspenseful story, breathtaking action sequences and groundbreaking effects.

Perhaps a product of its time, the *Terminator* franchise has, since then, demonstrated increasing metal fatigue, and none of the series entries made after the turn of the millennium have managed to capture any of the suspense or menace that made the James Cameron films so rivetingly intense. The announcement of yet another addition to the franchise was

*It's great to see
Linda Hamilton
step back into the
role with ease*

met with an understandable lack of enthusiasm, but there was nonetheless some intrigue this time around as Cameron was on board as a producer and, more importantly, Linda Hamilton was set to return to her iconic role as Sarah Connor.

Unambiguously erasing all the sequels from 2003 onwards, *Terminator: Dark Fate* seeks to bring us back to what mattered, namely Sarah Connor's journey. It's indeed great to see Linda Hamilton step back into the role with such ease; older and absolutely done with everyone

and their shit, she brings back an energy that alters the dynamic of the franchise for the better.

This is, therefore, very much Sarah Connor's film, and Hamilton's return to the franchise proves that she was a vital ingredient of the formula that made the first two films work so well. Having long centered around Arnold Schwarzenegger and the machines, the sequels became further and further removed from what the *Terminator* franchise is truly about: the human protagonists and their frantic fight for not only their own survival, but also that of humanity as a whole.

Where the previous sequels had become increasingly frustrating, thanks to absurdly bloated plots with headache-inducingly convoluted time travel "logic", *Dark Fate* strips the plot back down to a basic but

effective narrative about fleeing from a cynical killing machine that does not feel pity or remorse or fear and absolutely will not stop. Ever. Until you are dead.

As for the new additions in the cybernetic organism department, Mackenzie Davis brings a determined intensity to the table that serves her well in the action sequences, where she feels vulnerably human yet ultimately well-matched when taking on Gabriel Luna's REV 9 terminator in the well-choreographed fights. Davis leaves you with no doubts about her capabilities as an augmented human, and Luna at times channels Robert Patrick, even if he never quite manages to feel as genuinely menacing as the T-800 or the T-1000 did in the Cameron films.

However, while this is undoubtedly the best of the sequels made after the first two films, that is arguably not setting the bar very high, and one inevitably questions if the existence of *Terminator: Dark Fate* is justified. There isn't sufficient novelty added to the story, nor is the sense of finality particularly satisfying. This is due less to this film's failings than the fact that *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* was already the perfect conclusion to the story. Thus, the newest film lands in that somewhat awkward territory of being not quite a sequel and not quite a reboot; *Dark Fate* could easily be viewed as the killer robot version of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*.

Director Tim Miller does deliver a great action movie in its own right – one which at times manages to convey the odd glimpse of what made the original films so impressive – it nonetheless lacks the finesse Cameron brought to bear. Some purists will argue that anything made after the first film is

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.peterlaws.co.uk)

Skinner

Dir Ivan Nagey, US 1993
101 Films, £14.99 (Dual Format)

Rabid

Dir Jen Soska, Sylvia Soska, Canada 2019
101 Films, £11.99 (Blu-ray), £7.99 (DVD)

Ghost Story

Dir Stephen Weeks, UK 1974
Nucleus Films, £18.99 (Blu-ray)

3 From Hell

Dir Rob Zombie, US 2019
Lionsgate, £9.99 (Blu-ray), £7.99 (DVD)

Fancy some in-your-face horror this month? Then how about a sleazily violent chiller from 1993?

Once thought lost, *Skinner* has finally been resurrected by the film's screenwriter, who tracked down the master tapes after years of searching. It's now being released in the UK for the first time. Storywise, it's one of those 'your-lodger-is-a-serial-killer' flicks, with Ted Raimi playing the polite oddball who gets a kick out of dressing in women's flesh. That might not sound very original, but *Skinner* still manages to feel pretty darn unusual. Maybe it's the presence of porn star Traci Lords, who does a noble turn as a mysterious mutant, or perhaps it's because the landlady Raimi falls for is none other than Ricki Lake (her talk show debuted the same year that *Skinner* was released!). Maybe it's the bit when Raimi graphically peels the skin from a skull, all while making idle chit-chat with his dead victim; or it could be the way he adopts an inexplicable jive-talking accent when he dons the skin.

Whatever it is, *Skinner* is pretty damn weird, and that meant I rather liked it.



The second half feels like a psychotic episode of The A-Team

Next is the Soska Sisters' remake of David Cronenberg's *Rabid*. It's not as good as the 1977 original, but it's more thoughtful than you'd expect; plus, some of the make-up effects, like the main character's facial injury, are seriously wince-inducing. *Ghost Story* from 1974 is an unsettling supernatural tale in which two 1930s chums relentlessly pick on their supposed 'friend' Talbot during a weekend break.



Watch for the bit when Talbot screws up the picnic hamper. Never have I heard the phrase "Jam Sandwiches?" delivered with such chilling venom. If the bullying wasn't enough, poor old Talbot also has to deal with being stalked by a creepy Victorian doll. It may not be graphic in terms of gore, but *Ghost Story* sure as heck makes the most of its consistently nightmarish mood.

Finally, we have *3 From Hell*, the latest in Rob Zombie's 'it's-fun-to-kill' trilogy. At the close of *The Devil's Rejects*, cartoony killers Baby Firefly, Otis Driftwood and Captain Spaulding were thrown into prison. Now two of them have broken out of jail and immediately embark on a predictable, if energetic, killing spree. Half the film is a straight-up home invasion tale, until the action switches to Mexico where the clan must battle masked wrestlers. Yeah, it's a head-scratcher, and the last half feels like a psychotic episode of *The A-Team*. The film seems to re-tread the same ground that *Natural Born Killers* already covered decades earlier, and yet there's still a pleasure to be had in the cameos – not least Dee Wallace, who gets a rare chance to play a sadistic prison officer with a broken nose.

A sad note – as soon as I finished watching *3 From Hell*, I got a message saying that Sid Haig (Captain Spaulding, pictured at left) had died. Horror fans quickly shared stories of how sweet and genuine he was in real life, despite being famous for playing a heinous killer (along with many other roles). I met Sid myself over breakfast once, and he was a kind-hearted, fun and gentle fella. It's a reminder that while so many assume the horror world can only ever be populated by degenerates, more often than not, those folks slapping fake blood in your face turn out to have hearts of gold after all. RIP, Sid.

basically nonsensical, and that *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* was already a soft reboot of sorts, and one does struggle to find any genuine relevance in yet another instalment in the franchise, even if seeing Sarah Connor kick all kinds of ass makes for a decidedly good time.

Leyla Mikkelsen



Little Monsters

Dir Abe Forsythe, UK/Australia/US 2019

On UK release from 15 November

Often imitated but never duplicated, *Shaun of the Dead* stands as not only one of the greatest horror comedies of all time, but also as probably the greatest zombie comedy ever made. While Edgar Wright's 2004 effort was hardly the first of its kind – Peter Jackson's hilariously outrageous *Braindead*, with its record-breaking quantities of fake blood, gained instant cult status after its 1992 release – it nonetheless seemed that *Shaun* was released at the right time to be seen as the epitome of what a horror comedy could be.

With its myriad of pop culture references and its appearance at the moment when zombies were about to burst out of their horror subgenre and into mainstream entertainment, *Shaun of the Dead* spawned an onslaught of gory comedies. However, thanks to very modest budgets, underwhelming effects and writing that usually seems like little more than an afterthought, few films have managed to come anywhere even remotely close to capturing the witty eclecticism that made the 2004 film so much fun.

With *Little Monsters*, Aussie writer/director Abe Forsythe offers the latest attempt to match Wright's cult classic, and like most zombie comedies in recent years, his film is a mixed bag.

Boasting a pretty questionable resumé in terms of his previous features, male lead Alexander England nonetheless makes a likable protagonist as the flawed manchild with a heart of gold. An anti-hero, he must embark on a redemptive character arc that will see him mature and grow; and while, inevitably, he does become



a better person, he still stumbles along the way, often reverting to his old ways with puerile hilarity.

Lupita Nyong'o is unsurprisingly the cast member who largely carries the film on her competent shoulders, and is as enjoyable as ever to watch, not least because she clearly has an immense amount of fun playing the part of the zombie-slaying teacher. Her charisma as magnetic as ever, she works well with her co-stars, children and grown-ups alike, and just as her character takes charge of the apocalyptic scenario in the story, she takes charge of the film.

Similarly, Josh Gad clearly has a great time as he pokes fun at himself and a career that has been full of overly perky, family-friendly characters. Going from obnoxiously cheerful kids' show host to egocentric jerk (arguably traits that are not mutually exclusive), his character descends into amusingly foul-mouthed despair.

Even though the film manages to provoke laughter on several occasions, thanks to the playfulness of the cast and a script that never pretends to be aiming for any degree of maturity, the humour does come across as somewhat forced at times. While the central trio of performances and the strong script are the film's best points, the decidedly pedestrian production values attached to elements such as score, direction, cinematography, editing and special effects ultimately prevent *Little Monsters* from escaping mediocrity and achieving its goal of full-blown, chaotically hilarious zombie mayhem.

Because the film's zombies lack any genuine menace, the comedy doesn't have a significant level of true horror to bounce off. A good horror comedy uses the scary and the silly to offset one another and help create the sense of momentum and mounting tension the genre needs to succeed. Lacking this, *Little Monsters* ultimately has more in common with lower-tier efforts like *Cockneys versus Zombies* than *Shaun of the Dead*. It's not a bad zombie comedy, but it is a disposable romp that is as easily forgotten as it is enjoyed.

Leyla Mikkelsen



Der Pass

Dir Cyril Boss & Philipp Stennert, Germany/Austria 2019

RLJE International, £17.99 (DVD)

German detective drama *Der Pass* (retitled 'Pagan Peak' for UK viewers) starts promisingly. A man's body is found neatly laid across the German-Austrian border, clutching a clump of horse hair. Because of the situation, detectives from both countries are involved: the obligatory young, attractive female, Ellie Stocker, (Julia Jentsch) and the hardbitten, badly-dressed older man, Gedeon Winter (Nicholas Ofczarek). Both clearly have pasts; Ellie is an ambitious cop but has a certain fragility; Gedeon is mixed up with suppressing evidence for gangsters. Looking at the body Gedeon says: "One of us gets the head, the other the ass." Yes, it's yet another version of *The Bridge*.

A memory stick is sent to a journalist, with a recording of the last words of the victim: "My punishment will be your salvation... The red time of year is coming." By the end of the episode a blood-soaked and terrified naked young woman is found running through the woods, and we know there's another gruesome murder about to be revealed. Antlers are involved: the symbolism of Krampus, a German Christmas bogeyman who punishes naughty children. Could the talk of salvation refer to a (conveniently nearby) apocalyptic religious commune? Lots of promise, but...

There are far too many clichés. The English title is misleading; there's nothing pagan about the murders at all. By the third episode we know who the killer is, and watch him for the rest of the series staying one step ahead of the cops. He's a tech wizard; he plants bugs and cameras everywhere, including Ellie's bedroom. But even though we see the killer up close, meticulously planning his murders, his motivation remains unclear.

The scenery is beautiful, but snow-covered mountains can't carry an eight-episode story that starts feeling tired well before the half-way point. Revealing the killer to us (but not to the police) so early was a huge plotting error.

David V Barrett



BLU-RAY AND DVD

NOVEMBER

Eureka Entertainment, £9.99 (Blu-ray)

Pitched somewhere between Jean Rollin's lyrical creepiness and Jan Švankmajer's crunchy fables, Rainer Sarnet's film is a likeable but loose confection of fairy tale tropes: the Devil stalks the woods; plague comes in the form of a young woman with a deadly kiss, but sticking your trousers on your head will keep you safe; wise old crones tell weird and wonderful stories. It doesn't have the enchanting energy of *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, for example, but it certainly has its moments. An ill-fated, class defying love story (guided by a wise snowman) is lovely, with Jörgen Liik excellent as the hapless beau. Special mention, too, for the kratts, work-eager automatons made of odds and ends, which are utterly delightful and beautifully realised. **Martin Parsons** ★★★★★

RABID

101 Films, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

Former porn star Marilyn Chambers ably plays Rose, a crash victim who develops a diseased phallus that pulses from a wound in her armpit. She hugs a lot of people and turns them into mouth-frothing freaks. I love *Rabid*. It's got what great infection movies should have: a sense of scale. The swivel-eyed zombies Rose creates are scary and feel genuinely diseased. They're different to Romero's shufflers, too. Critics sometimes accuse Cronenberg of lacking heart. I disagree. At times he shows affection for his characters, it's just that he's inclined to show sympathy for the diseases they carry too. *Rabid* comes from an amazingly fertile early period in his career, where the director was happy pushing philosophical boundaries as well as horror envelopes. This new two-disc reissue from 101 Films also features an excellent new documentary looking at the Canadian horror boom of the 70s. Essential. **PL** ★★★★★

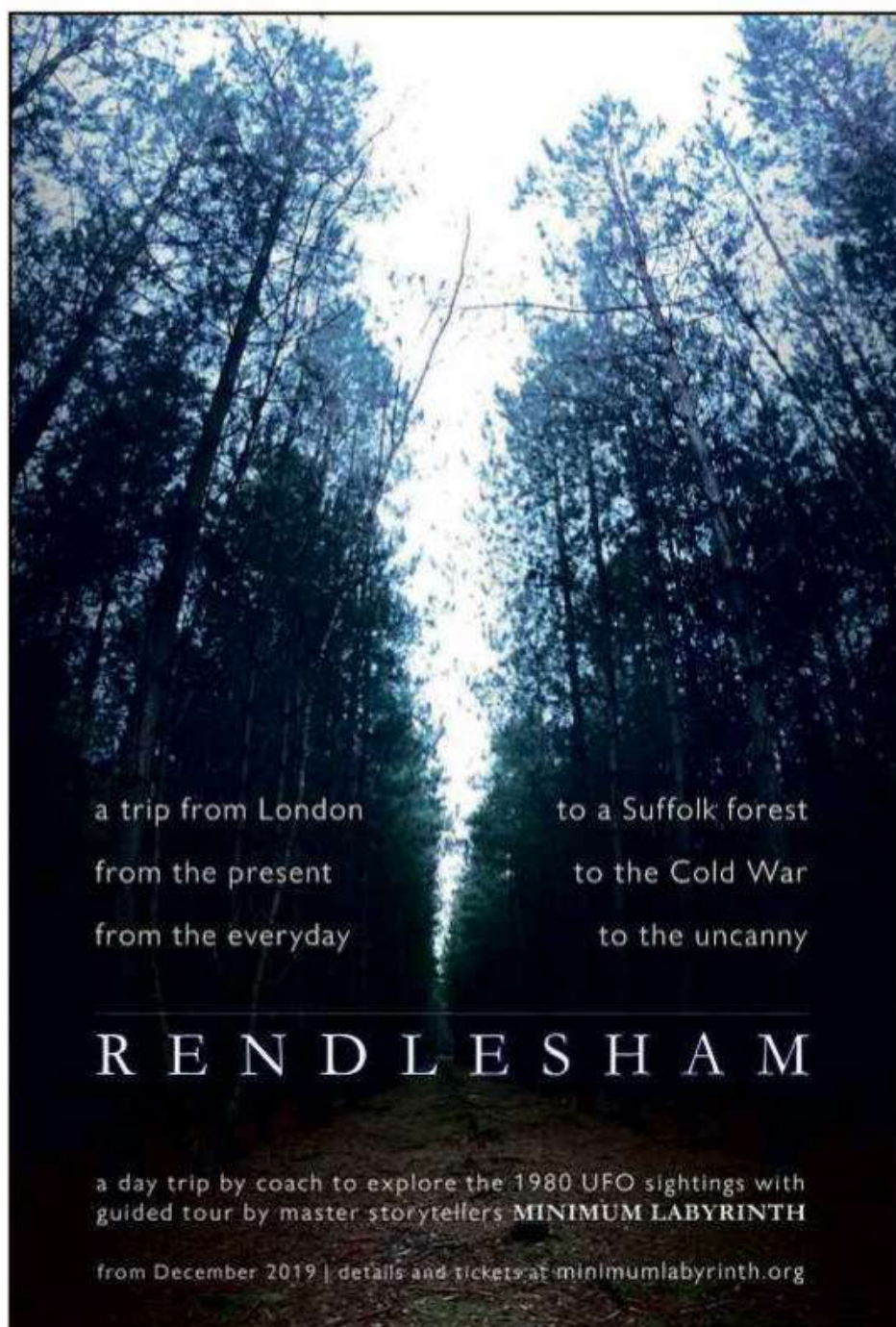
THE PUNCH AND JUDY MAN / THE REBEL

Network, each £17.99 (Blu-ray), £12.99 (DVD)

The latest releases in Network's invaluable 'The British Film' series see Tony Hancock's two starring vehicles in brand-new HD transfers. 1960's *The Rebel* is the better known of the pair, a Galton and Simpson scripted gem in which Hancock's would-be Gauguin escapes a London office job and relocates to Paris, where his complete lack of talent is mistaken for a new form of artistic genius. Skewering modern art fads, middle-class pseudo-intellectuals and beatnik hangers-on (who all dress exactly the same while talking about individuality), the film transfers Hancock's TV persona (and many of his regular supporting cast) to the big screen with amusing results; Irene Handl deserves special mention for her hilarious turn as Hancock's suburban landlady, Mrs Crevatte, whose horrified reaction to the artist's 'masterpiece', "Aphrodite at the Water Hole", is unforgettably funny). 1962's *The Punch and Judy Man*, written by Hancock and Philip Oakes, is a possibly semi-autobiographical story about a seaside entertainer's failing marriage set against the backdrop of the provincial South Coast resort of Piltown. Despite evocative black and white cinematography from Gilbert Taylor and a wonderful cast, which includes Sylvia Sims, John le Mesurier and Hugh Lloyd, the film can be counted only a partial success. It has some very funny moments, but its appealing atmosphere of gentle melancholy is frequently sabotaged by Jeremy Summers's uneven direction and by Hancock himself, whose one-man set pieces go against the grain of what is really an ensemble piece. Nevertheless, it's an essential entry in that niche subgenre of melancholic comedies set in faded English seaside towns. **DS** ★★★★★



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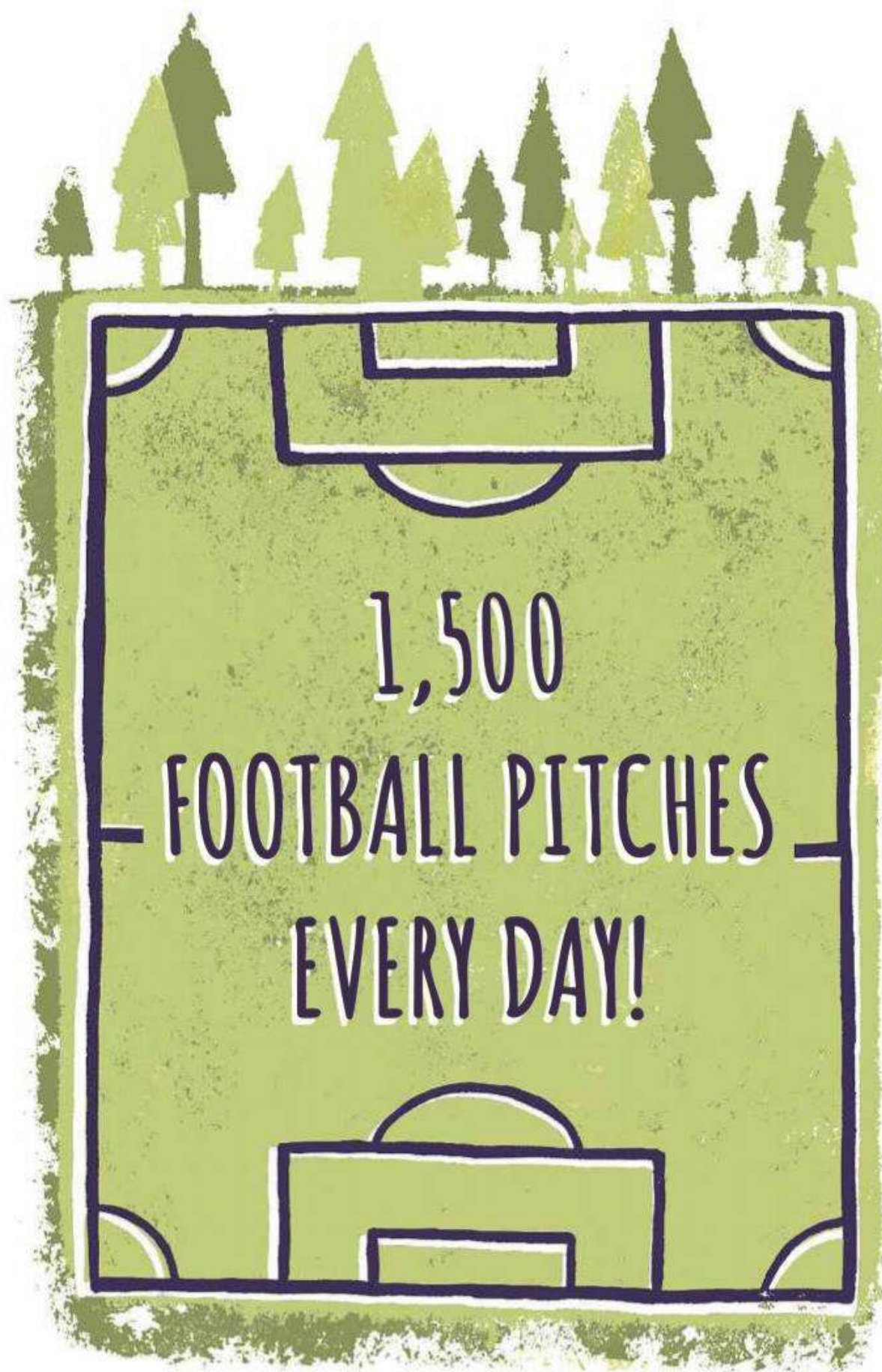
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Matrix Glitches

Martin Jenkins (**FT384:73**) comments on arguments in **FT382:73** by Nils Erik Grande concerning the unlikelihood of our living within a computer simulation, stating that it would be highly improbable that such a simulation could have run for so long without glitching. Famously, program re-sets in ‘The Matrix’ trilogy are used to explain our experiences of déjà-vu – so I might go further (fully recognising that this is not a new theme) to propose that maybe the ‘great program’ is in fact bedevilled with many glitches – the very lapses in reality which end up reported in our beloved *Fortean Times*.

Yours until ‘Game Over’ appears written across the sky.

Anthony Wilkins

Ripponden, West Yorkshire

Martin Jenkins’s comment that we can’t be in a computer simulation as we don’t see any glitches makes complete sense... except that I’m sure we had a glitch in Feb 2012. Up until then I ‘knew’ that Sylvester Stallone had died of a heart attack in 2010, and despite being an avid fan of Carlos Santana since the 1970s, he suddenly gained a guitar-playing brother called Jorge who I had never heard of before. Weird.

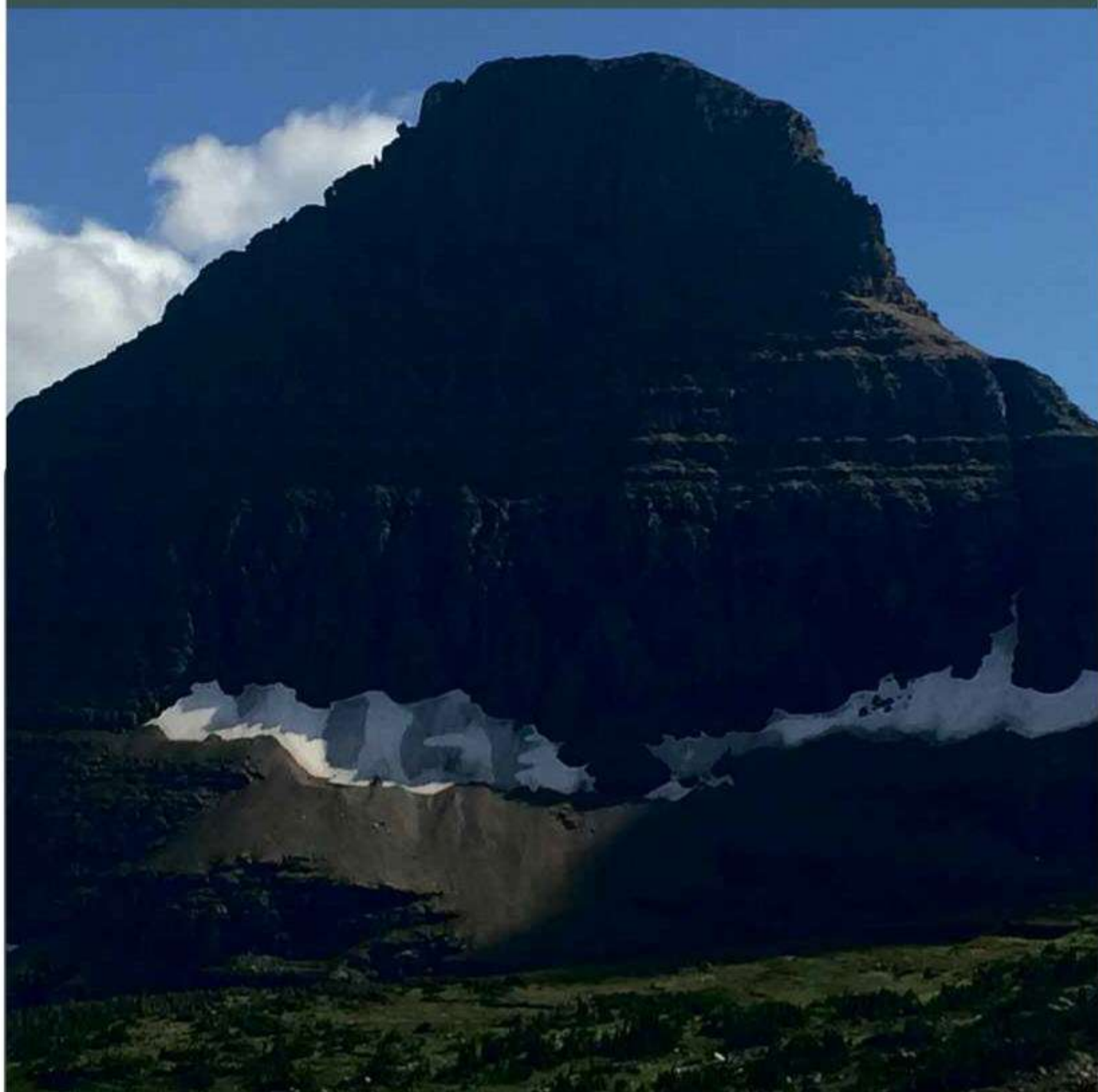
Steve Small

High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire

Disinformation

Regarding ‘Keeping a lid on the V2’ [**FT384:55**], the main reason the V2 strikes were portrayed as random gas explosions is that the War Ministry didn’t want the Germans to know whether or not they had successfully targeted London. As Andrew May says elsewhere in the same article when he quotes former CIA Director Richard Helms – the enemy had access to the same news as the British public. Similarly, when V1 missiles started hitting London, the War Ministry announced that missiles had landed north of London, for example, in the hope the Germans would hear this news and recalibrate their missiles to land further south, so missing

SIMULACRA CORNER



David Phelps photographed this mountain at the Hidden Lake Trail in Glacier National Park, Montana, on 13 August 2019. He was struck by the remnant of snow or ice that appears to be labelled ‘ICE’ in large capital letters.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteanimes.com.

London altogether.

By the way, Mark Pilkington’s *Mirage Men* is a great book for an insight into counter-intelligence.

Bert Gray-Malkin

By email

May I offer a couple of additions to Carol Scott’s letter [**FT384:73**]? There was at least one occasion when a Spitfire nearly shot down a V2. The *Tomorrow’s World* presenter Raymond Baxter recalled that on 14 February 1945 his

squadron raided a V2 launch site and his wingman shot at a rocket as it took off. He commented that he dreaded what might have happened if he’d hit it. Also, V1s were not necessarily shot down. As they flew quite slowly, aircraft could easily get alongside them, put a wingtip under the missile’s wingtip and flip them over, causing them to crash short of their target.

Martin Jenkins

London

Megalithomania

In Rob Irving’s Conference Report on the Megalithomania Conference in Glastonbury earlier this year [**FT384:26**], he has a caption to a photograph of Hugh Newman and some of the speakers at the conference, labelling them as “founders and speakers”. As a point of information, the original founder of the Megalithomania conferences was Neil Mortimer, former editor of *The Third Stone*

LETTERS

journal, and co-founder with me of *Time & Mind* (www.tandfonline.com/RTAM).

Paul Devereux
Cotswolds

Grateful Death

Of course I, and many others, read Rob Gandy's letter about striking correspondences [FT384:75] on the day we found out that the Grateful Dead's lyricist Robert Hunter had died, thus adding a reaction shot to the Cosmic Joker's punchline. Bearing in mind the nature of the Dead's music, philosophy and fan base, I suspect there's a book to be written about the synchronicities they inspire (also the mighty Arthur Lee's Love, who lyrically seemed to predict much of their own future).

Graeme Kenna
By email

Earwig odyssey

One Sunday in August 2016, I watched an earwig walk in a continuous counter-clockwise circle for well over eight hours, on the deck of my mobile home. It was as if the critter was walking around the edge of a nickel. I managed to capture this intermittently on my phone's video camera, so I've got about a minute and 30 seconds of footage. I needed to run some errands, which took about an hour. When I returned, the earwig was still walking in a circle. It eventually meandered to the side of a plank and subsequently fell to the ground, out of sight.

Can anybody explain this behaviour? It may seem mundane, but to date, it's one of the most fascinating things I think I've ever witnessed.

David Cook
Thornton, Colorado

Dog Save the Queen

Back in the early 1980s when TV actually finished for the night and the BBC played the National Anthem before shutdown and the white dot appeared, I was in the kitchen watching the black and white portable. My dog Timmy was asleep in his basket.



Champion beards

Here's a prodigiously bearded gent (above left) to add to those assembled by Jan Bondeson [FT384:38-43]. He was a 16th century master butcher of Troyes in Champagne, and his portrait hangs in the town's art gallery. The image is my own photograph, taken in the gallery. I wasn't allowed to use flash, and my camera is pretty basic. I've had a look on the Troyes museum websites, but I can't find another image.

Martin Jenkins, *London*

I have (unofficially) Britain's Longest Beard (above right) at 2ft 10in (86cm). It has been growing since 4 February 2009. I had had a go at an old-fashioned skittles alley on 31 January. As I was going to pick up the next ball, I dislocated my right knee and fell to the floor. After four days recuperating at home without shaving, I decided to let my beard grow.

Paul Wright, *Southampton, Hampshire*

The National Anthem started up and immediately Timmy, still asleep, stood up. He remained standing throughout the rendition of 'God Save the Queen' and flopped back down again, still asleep, immediately it finished. I was suitably astounded and unfortunately the only witness. Timmy was a stray, rescued by the vet after being hit by a car, so it is just conceivable that he had been trained, but he was young and otherwise rather disobedient. Despite best efforts, he never again reacted to the National

Anthem, asleep or awake. I like to think reincarnation – do other readers have similar experiences or theories?

Susie Dickinson
Hardwicke, Gloucester

Fox attack

Regarding the Waiblingen "Beast of Baden" [FT381:24] (actually, not in Baden at all, but in Swabia, a different part of the federal land of Baden-Württemberg), the *Sun's* source for the story about a monster attacking

a young man was the German tabloid *Bild*, which has bigger headlines than copy text. Rather more restraint was shown by the local newspapers.

Marco L and his friends were camping in a garden when the attack occurred, and it was possible to retrieve DNA from the animal. Very early on, vets and medics thought the attacking beast had been a common fox, but the family vigorously denied this, as Marco had become the focus of a shitstorm on social media (*Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 5 May 2019). In mid-May, specialists of the famous Senckenberg Institute in Gelnhausen (Hesse) had analysed DNA from the jacket and bite traces on the tent, and found that the attacker had definitely been a fox. (*Stuttgarter Zeitung, Bild*, 14 May 2019). If a fox had a go at me in the night, I think I'd be pretty scared, too.

Ulrich Magin
Hennef, North Rhine-Westphalia

They All Love Jack

Rob Gandy's Forum article "The Flypaper Murder" [FT383:57] relates the tragic case of Florence Maybrick's alleged poisoning of her husband James, her subsequent imprisonment, and later much-disputed claims that James was in fact Jack the Ripper, as evidenced in the possible forgery/hoax *Jack the Ripper Diaries* (1993). *Fortean Times* readers may be interested to know that in the immense, 850-page missive, *They All Love Jack: Busting the Ripper* (2015), *Withnail and I* author Bruce Robinson identifies the Ripper not as James, but rather his egomaniacal brother Michael Maybrick.

Michael, who was a successful musician ("They All Love Jack" was one of his many popular tunes published under the pseudonym Stephen Adams), rubbed elbows with England's best and brightest, including those in positions of considerable power and prestige. Maybrick's livelihood of evening performances in concert halls put him in the proximity of any number of crimes, as well as the distant origination points of the letters associated with the Ripper, many of them previously



assumed to be from cranks. Moreover, Maybrick hated women, Florence foremost among them, but not for her alleged role in James's death. In fact, Robinson claims that it was Michael, not Florence, who poisoned James – there was apparently no love lost between brothers – with Michael subsequently framing Florence for her husband's murder. Her imprisonment seemed to have satiated Maybrick's appetite for mayhem – the ferocity of the murders of all previous female victims of Maybrick could've been because they were Florence's stand-ins.

Following the trial, he retreated to a comfortable upper class retirement in a spacious, well appointed home. Robinson's *coup de grace* is his claim that, in addition to the hundreds of Ripper letters, the prolific scribe Maybrick then went on to write the controversial *Jack the Ripper Diary*. The diary, discovered by an unemployed former Liverpool scrap dealer in 1992 and published in 1993, in which Michael implicates his brother James, would be his final act of revenge. It is essentially a post mortem false confession – apparently dead men *do* talk.

In true conspiratorial mode, Robinson sees the mutilations of victims as suggestive of Masonic symbols, of which the Goulston Street graffito "The Juwes are the men who will not be blamed for nothing" is the most overt; "Juwes" apparently refers to the three assassins of Masonic legend – Jubela, Jubelo and Jubelum. It seems that Maybrick, himself a Mason who often played the organ at Masonic meetings, was toying with Charles Warren – Commissioner of Metropolitan Police, Freemason, and amateur archaeologist, and addressee ("Dear Boss") of many of the most suspect Ripper letters – who was evocatively described by Robinson as "an aggressive authoritarian who imagined all social ills could be solved with a truncheon". Warren, eager to suppress the Masonic connection, wasted no time in the graffito's removal. "Why this writing was really rubbed out has defined the life-blood of Bro Jack and the circus of smokescreens and



moving mirrors ever since," Robinson writes, "Bro" being an abbreviation of the Masonic title of "Brother".

Incredibly, Robinson theorises that Maybrick in his murders intentionally employed these overt and covert symbols and language associated with Masonry's occult mythology. Maybrick anticipated that those in positions of authority, the Establishment – nearly all of them Masons – would, in recognition of these clues, allow the crime to go unsolved in order to avoid incriminating one of their own. To arrest Maybrick, Robinson argues, would have "put an entire (and clandestine) ruling elite in the dock – its morals, its monarchy – and would possibly have had the cataclysmic side-effect of extirpating Freemasonry from the judiciary, the police and the royal family for all time." Indeed, Robinson maintains, rather than pursue more fruitful leads, the police propped up intentionally unlikely suspects, most of them from ethnic minorities, principally Jewish or Irish. By failing to pursue the evidence, Robinson maintains, the police – along with the coroners, judges, and politicians – essentially acted as knowing accomplices by allowing the murders to continue.

In pursuit of the Freemason theory, Robinson joins Stephen Knight's untenable *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution* (1978), the inspiration for Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's superb *From Hell* (1989-1998) and its subsequent, much-maligned 2001 film adaptation. Yet Knight, by comparison, presents a rather more limited conspiracy meant to cover up the relationship

between Prince Albert (grandson of Queen Victoria) and a working class girl named Annie Crook, and their illegitimate child. The canonical five victims were either friends, witnesses, or both to Crook and Prince Albert's relationship and the subsequent birth – perpetrated by a Masonic royal doctor acting upon orders of the Queen. Knight has the Freemasonry apparent in the murders as signature; Moore in his equally fictional adaptation refashions these Masonic signatures as occult invocation.

Robinson's impressive research shows that further esoteric Masonic symbols are evident throughout the allegedly spurious voluminous correspondence and, equally intriguingly, in additional murders not usually associated with the Ripper, including the ritualistic murder of seven-year-old Johnnie Gill in Bradford, and the "Whitehall Mystery", the torso believed to be Lilly Vass, discovered some 48 hours after the murder of Ripper victim Catherine Eddowes. The torso, left in the foundations of New Scotland Yard, Warren's new police headquarters, was (according to Robinson) a nod to the archaeologically inclined Warren, who in 1884, during his previous career as surveyor, attempted to locate the foundations of Solomon's Temple by excavating a section underneath the Temple Mount.

The torso's cut through at the pelvis, Robinson contends, is a clear reference to the killing of Jubelum, whom King Solomon ordered to be "taken without the walls of the Temple and there have your body severed in two". Eddowes, like the previous victim Annie Chapman, and in keeping with Masonic ritual, had her throat cut, her abdomen sliced open, and her entrails carefully placed over her right shoulder. Eddowes's murder, Robinson

notes, occurred in Mitre Square; a mitre is the name given to the head covering of a Masonic high priest. Unlike Chapman, Eddowes's killer also carved slashes into her face that "look like a pair of compasses," symbols that Warren found engraved on the stones of Solomon's temple.

Robinson's theories have their strengths and weaknesses. Dates and locations of Maybrick's performances match murder sites as well as explain the troubling aspects of the Ripper correspondence, namely its provenance and its contents, much of which has never before been satisfactorily addressed; the railways offered an effective means of escape, and his career as celebrated artist provided the perfect cover. As for the weaknesses, as with most conspiracy theories, Robinson requires a too-great suspension of disbelief, primarily that so many actors in the criminal investigation be "in on it". Knowing what we know about human behaviour, such a vast, airtight cover-up seems highly unlikely. Nevertheless, *They All Love Jack* has much to recommend it: Robinson is a capable and thorough researcher, and an astonishingly good storyteller who manages to transform the at times rather tedious trial of Florence Maybrick into a compulsive page-turner.

Furthermore, his expletive-heavy dressing down of the hypocrisies of the British upper class during the Victorian era, and of the Ripperologists and the cottage industry Ripper-based media – he mistakenly includes Moore and Campbell's



PAUL TAYLOR

LETTERS

From Hell among them, though it was equally critical of this phenomenon – which depends on the murders’ insolubility for its perpetuation, achieves an almost sublime concentration of unrefined, unadulterated invective. Robinson’s vivid, unrestrained book is at turns engrossing and entertaining, repellent, lurid, grotesque, and heartbreaking, a vast panoramic *Grand Guignol* portrait of Victorian London, and a ripping good conspiracy theory. Whatever one’s opinion of Robinson’s arguments, his is certainly one of the most provocative Ripper books to come around in quite some time. [For more on Jack the Ripper, see **FT155:6, 43-47; 310:37-39; 320:18-19; 324:24.**]

Eric Hoffman
By email

Concorde sighting

Having just read the tale of the 1975 sighting of ‘Concorde’ emerging low from over a hedge somewhere between Bridgnorth and Whitchurch (‘A miscellany of Merseyside mysteries’, **FT382:39**), I might be able to offer a possible solution.

I lived in Shropshire from 1963 to 1981 and was living in part of Telford, aged 19, at the time of this sighting. I was aware of RAF Cosford and interested in aircraft, and frequently passed the airfield, mostly on the train, which gave a good view of the runways (and still does). It was a fairly common experience to see one or more of the V bomber fleet on the airfield at the time. The Victor, Valiant and Vulcan had all visited this RAF base and can be seen at the Cold War Museum on the site today. As I understand it, Cosford was home to some of them in active service for a time. It was a functioning museum as early as the mid-1970s too, with working V bombers as exhibits.

Two of these three aircraft have a shape that could easily be mistaken for Concorde (swept back v-shaped wings), and often flew on exercises into and out of the base. Although I couldn’t say when these exercises occurred, they certainly included low-level flying. Also, the journey from

Bridgnorth to Whitchurch would almost certainly pass one other RAF base, Shawbury, known nowadays for helicopters, but, again, the V bombers had almost certainly taken off from there on exercise. In addition, a now disused RAF base, Prees Heath, lies just outside of Whitchurch. It certainly had a long intact runway in the 1970s, but I can’t say if it was in use in 1975.

Al Ogilvy
By email

Momo and the Moon

- Regarding the *Spectator* quotation in the letter from Nils Erik Grande (RIP) about 13 at table [**FT384:73**], I wonder if the “spare young men” were thin, and therefore in need of a good meal, or just chaps at a loose end.

- In response to the letter from Simon Deeming about the light over Birmingham [**FT384:74**], I suggest that (despite his dismissal) it could have been a “shooting star” or meteor: if it was travelling at an angle, across the field of view but also away from the viewer, it would appear to be travelling more slowly than it actually was.

- I think the lunar odour sideline [**FT384:7**] is a bit misleading. It would have been unwise for the astronauts to take off their helmets upon landing, to sniff the “air”. A bit like some of the pubs in my area, there’s no atmosphere. I believe they donned spacesuits, de-pressurised the lunar module, and stepped out. On returning to the module, they re-pressurised it and took off their space suits. It was then that they smelt the dust they had brought back on their suits.

- The review of the book *Momo* about the Missouri Monster [**FT384:61**] reminds me of what I have often thought in such cases. It seems entirely possible that at least some sightings are simply of an individual who chooses to live away from civilisation, wears animal skins or ragged clothing, and forgoes the grooming and hygiene which most of us

subscribe to. It seems quite likely that such an individual, glimpsed through the trees, could be mistaken for something more mysterious.

Dave Miles
By email

Effing and blinding

Regarding the recent stories of parrots behaving badly [**FT382:8-9**], I recall the African Grey parrot at Tooting Broadway Market in London that used to swear at passers-by on the pet stall back in the days of Citizen Smith and the Tooting Popular Front. The bird unfortunately began to use “politically incorrect language” and eventually had to be removed by the stall’s owners due to the inevitable complaints, as it was eventually too much, even in the notoriously non-PC climate of the 1970s.

No one could blame the bird; it was some previous owner who had taught it such vile and offensive language. It was a miracle that no one tried to throttle it, or for that matter the owners, as this was in the days of Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League versus the National Front skinheads. Even today the swearing, racist, sexist and homophobic parrot of Tooting Broadway Market is still recalled by older locals and has entered the folklore of the now gentrified and very PC area....

Phil Brand
London

Haunted Hotel

We thought you’d find the exchange below between a Bangkok hotel guest and management from the Trip Advisor hotel review page interesting. My husband and I are staying at this hotel (where we have stayed before) next year.

“Stayed in this hotel from 19th to 23rd March 2019 to attend business event. I really liked the hotel, attitude of the staff, service, cleanliness of the room... BUT the place definitely has something supernatural dwelling inside. First night I woke up as if someone woke me up and had feeling that someone is in the

room. I could hear like someone walking past the bed from window to the door. I turned on the lights: no one and door is locked from inside... I thought I dreamt it all.

“Next day during the lunch the guy attending the same event told me that he slept very badly because he was woken up a few times and once heard someone talking in his room at the window side-table... The same night I again felt some presence in the room like someone was sitting on the corner of the bed and finished sleeping with lights on.

“The third day I met my Thai buyer and shared my experience with him, trying to make it sound light as a joke because I don’t want people to think I am delusional or something. He though took it very seriously and advised me to buy something to give to the ghost, like red Fanta in a small glass bottle, which I did... This night before falling asleep I again heard someone or something moving in the room, clicking fingers, then I heard the sound of something like glass tinkling (I put the open glass bottle behind the TV) and after that sounds stopped and ghost stopped coming.”

Response from the General Manager at Centara Grand at Central Plaza Ladprao Bangkok, 26 March 2019:

“Dear value guest, we were pleased to hear that you appreciated and enjoyed your stay at Centara Grand at Central Plaza Ladprao Bangkok... We took it seriously, our engineering team has checked all room conditions as mostly the noise always come from A/C or window. There is a belief in ghost and supernatural spirits. We also do annual monk ceremony and blessing for many occasions i.e. New Year, Chinese New Year, Songkran, Christmas, Hotel birthday and etc. These to bring good luck and dispel all bad things. We do appreciate your comment and we never have a supernatural case before. With best regards, James Robert Wilson, General Manager.”

Javier Mojica & Francis Van Buggenhout
By email

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts of strange experiences from *FT* readers

The Black Imp

As children my sister and I were not prone to flights of fancy. We'd had to grow up quickly due to family issues, and did not spook easily. In the mid 1960s we were constantly moving between my mother and father; we lived in various properties in and around London. Despite one such building allegedly being haunted by a merchant sea captain, we had never experienced anything strange, apart from when we visited our grandparents' home. They lived in a modest three-bedroom house on Engadine Street, Southfields, London, and from the age of three, I would visit daily with my sister until we finally moved in with them when I was eight.

I hated that Victorian terrace house; it had the most evil atmosphere you could imagine. One of my earliest memories is of being utterly paralysed with fear, having to go up to use the toilet at the top of the stairs. I must have been around three at the time, and although this sort of thing is a common fear with children, I was never this way in any other property. Whenever I used the bathroom I had an overwhelming feeling that 'something' was outside the door, waiting for me. I was certain that it came from the attic hatch directly above the bathroom door. Although I have no explanation for this feeling, over the years it was compounded and in some strange way 'made physical'. I would like to emphasise that although our home life was chaotic and at times traumatic, my sister and I relished getting to see our loving and caring grandparents. The dark and oppressive atmosphere at their home was in no way a reaction to them as people.

When I first saw what my sister and I came to call 'the black imp', I was around eight years old. It was shortly after my sister and I had actually moved in with my grandparents. One evening I was walking downstairs from my newly appointed bedroom when

"The skin of his hairless body was like shiny wet black leather, and his head had no facial features other than hollowed indentations where his ears, eyes and mouth should be..."

I saw him. He stood crouched at around 2ft (60cm) tall, and was at the bottom of the stairs at the right-hand side of the living room door. The skin of his hairless body was like shiny wet black leather, and his head had no facial features other than hollowed indentations where his ears, eyes and mouth should be. He was hideous. I couldn't scream; I felt too terrified to make any sound; I just ran as fast as I could. I never thought I had imagined it, as its presence was felt constantly within the walls of the house, and seeing a physical manifestation of this feeling made some sort of sense. It was as though I already knew that this thing lived there with us.

Over the years both my sister and I saw the black imp regularly. His hunched sickly body would drag itself along, clinging to the walls, wandering in the hallways and landing, but his favourite spot was by the door to the front room. He would stand guard there, waiting for something. My sister and I rarely talked about the imp, we didn't want to, so I don't think we influenced each other too greatly in this respect. We just wanted it gone, and discussing it almost seemed to be taboo. I remember, however, one occasion I was frantic with fear, confessing to my grandparents about this entity, but they laughed about it and tried to calm me, which is quite understandable. The black imp was a regular feature of those early years, but we never got used to seeing him. He never became mundane or comfortable; he just filled me with the most intense dread.

As the teenage years went along, we stopped seeing the black imp. We didn't think or talk about him; we had discovered boys, records, going out and living life. His stooped frame and black husk of a face were thankfully forgotten. By our late teens, my sister and I had moved out and moved on. We had babies of our own, and the real world had us now; an imp was something from fairytales, fantastical and childish. I suspect that if I had thought about the black imp again during that period, I would have dismissed it as the product of an overactive imagination. However, this little creature had one more appearance to make.

In 1983 my grandfather was approaching the end of his life. He had a massive stroke, and as a result had to use the front room on the ground floor as a bedroom. My sister and I would visit when we could, to sit and talk with him. Although he was fairly lucid in some ways, he would often see things in the room others couldn't; for one, he was convinced his sisters, who had been dead for many years, were with him often, and he would talk to them and about them as if they were there in the room. Sometimes his hallucinations were more fantastical. He spoke of skinheads in the walls, and strange lights. One visit, however, he said something that made my blood run a little cold and has never left me: that a little black boy had been coming from behind his bed, and pinching him. The back of his bed was right next to the black imp's main manifestation point.

Karen McCloud
Pembrokeshire

It's 'her' again!

A number of years ago I worked in the field of architectural salvage with my father and brother; our workshop was housed in an old coach house and bar.

Over the years, we all experienced the feeling that someone had just walked past you while your back was turned, although this had been going on for some time before we mentioned it to each other. On other occasions you sometimes heard someone swish past you and caught sight of movement in the corner of your eye – or heard the sound of floorboards being stepped on, but turned to find no one there.

These occurrences usually happened three or four times a year. On one occasion we heard the door open and close, but no one entered the room. When we went to investigate, there was no one there but an overpowering smell of sulphur, and as we got closer to the door a strange impression rather like static electricity could be felt. The hair on my arms stood up quite visibly. This went on sporadically for a number of years and we always referred to the anomaly as feminine, such as "I heard her again today".

One day we were visited by a customer looking for some Victorian fireplaces; he looked around the showroom for a few minutes before approaching the workshop. He told us he was training to be a medium (whatever that entails) and asked if we knew we had a ghost. We told him of our experiences over the years, and he said: "The ghost is female – and don't worry, she is friendly." We took what he said with a pinch of salt, but were intrigued that we always used "she" when discussing the matter. From that day until my father retired 10 years later, we never heard or saw anything of "her" ever again.

Jonny Forster
New Crofton, West Yorkshire

Fortean Traveller



118. The Hamburg Panoptikum

JAN BONDESON visits a venerable Hamburg institution that has survived two world wars and the loss of its chamber of horrors in an RAF bombing raid



In 1879, Friedrich Herman Faerber founded one of the earliest waxwork museums in Germany, the Panoptikum in the St Pauli district of Hamburg. In 1889, the museum moved into capacious new quarters at the Wilhelmshalle, on the Spielbudenplatz, just off the notorious Reeperbahn, where it remained for many years: it boasted an impressive collection of old German kings and emperors, effigies of various Hamburg personalities, a large chamber of horrors full of German murderers and foreign assassins, and a somewhat indecent collection of anatomical models that was only open to women on Fridays.



TOP: The Panoptikum today. **ABOVE:** A postcard stamped and posted in 1903, showing the Panoptikum in its heyday at the Wilhelmshalle.

It is curious to note that just like the Passage-Panoptikum in Berlin, Pickard's Waxworks in Glasgow and Stewart's Waxworks in Edinburgh, the Hamburg Panoptikum doubled as a freak show from the 1880s until the Great War. In 1885, the seven-year-old conjoined twins Rosa and Josepha Blazek were exhibited on the premises. The following year came Herr Jos. Büllesbach, who had an enormous beard. The celebrated Russian giant Feodor Machnow was at the Panoptikum in 1903, and the Tirol giantess Mariedl was exhibited there in 1908. The Hamburg Panoptikum sometimes issued postcards to advertise its freaks on show, like the French giant Joseph Dusorc and a troupe of three midget sisters. Wax effigies of the most successful performers, like Dusorc and Mariedl, were constructed to remain permanently at the Panoptikum long after the travelling freaks had left to seek pastures new.

Like any self-respecting old waxworks museum, the Panoptikum had a *Schreckenskammer* or chamber of horrors, situated on the second floor and open to the curious for an additional 20 Pfennigs. It boasted a replica of an old Hamburg guillotine, an electric chair imported from America, and a selection of torture instruments. A large collection of wax models of German and foreign murderers included the teacher Johann Georg Rüsau, who had murdered his entire family, six people strong, back in 1803; the Altona child murderer Carl Bleitrück; and the gardener's helper Rücker who had murdered the Hamburg dentist Claussen in 1906. Burke and Hare, of Edinburgh infamy, were honoured with an inclusion. The *Schreckenskammer* remained vigorous throughout Imperial times, being considered one of the sights of the Reeperbahn.

The Hamburg Panoptikum survived the Great War, but hard times arrived in the 1920s, when the cinematograph was killing off the waxen stars of yesteryear, and closing



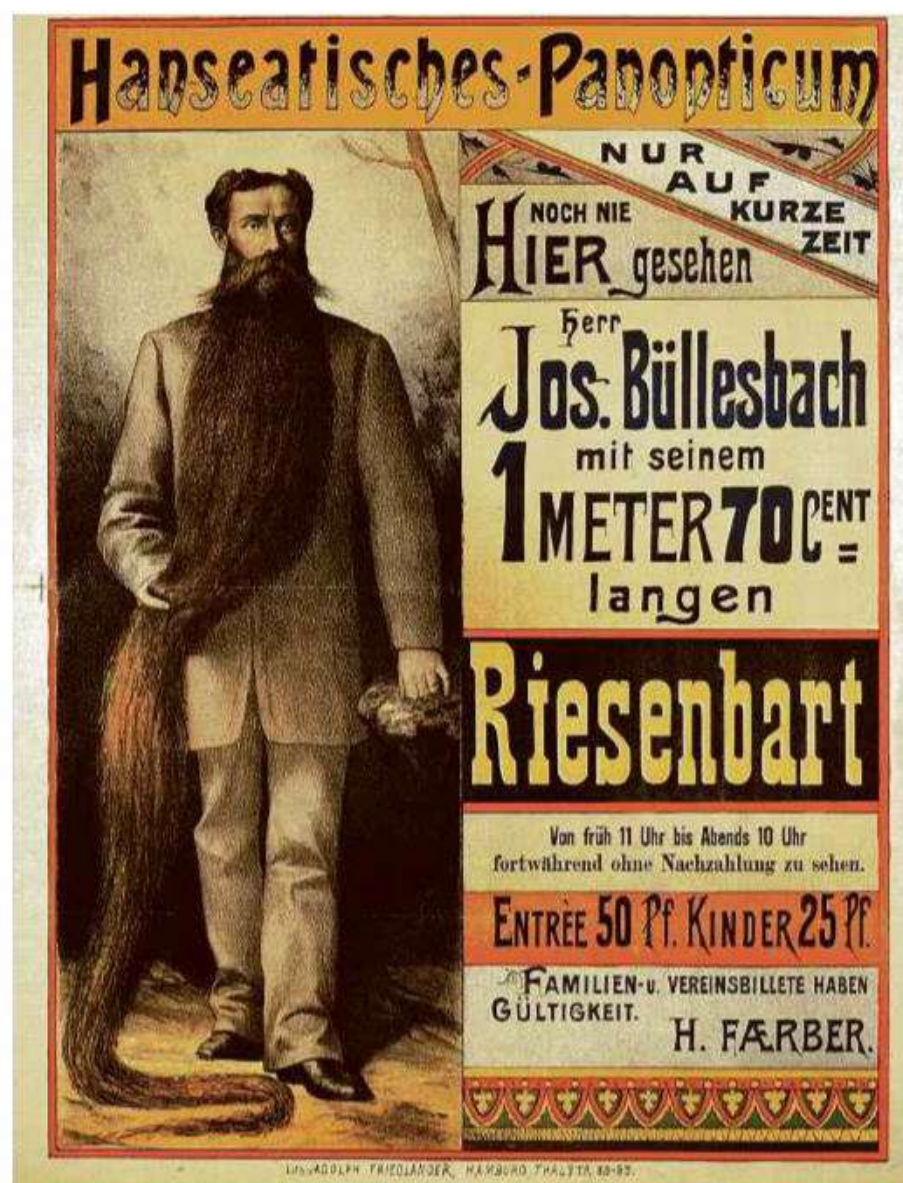
PHOTOS: JAN BONDESON

ABOVE: Bill Durks, Baster Simkus and Mariedl on display at the Panoptikum. BELOW RIGHT: An ad for Herr Jos. Büllesbach with his enormous beard. BELOW LEFT: Miss Gabriele, the celebrated half-lady, said in a Dresden postcard to be of English descent and in an English card to hail from Switzerland, being exhibited in 1907.

down the great wax museums of Berlin, Copenhagen, and Stockholm for good. But the Panoptikum managed to struggle on through the 1920s and 1930s, with new models added at regular intervals; the mass murderers Fritz Haarmann and Peter Kürten, for instance, arrived to reinforce the chamber of horrors.

The outbreak of World War II brought disaster when in June 1943 a devastating RAF bombing raid completely destroyed the old building in the Spielbudenplatz. Only a few of the wax models could be saved, and the entire *Schreckenskammer*, consisting of 32 wax models strong, was annihilated.

In 1948, the Panoptikum reopened with a collection of 28 wax figures, soon to be joined by sinister-looking effigies of Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun, Göring and Goebbels. In the 1950s, the Faerber family decided that the old waxworks museum would be relocated to a new building in the Spielbudenplatz. Every traditionalist will be pleased to learn that in a time not favourably disposed to commercial waxwork displays, it is still active there today. Some of the wax figures, like Napoleon, Frederick the Great, Schiller, Beethoven, Martin Luther and Richard Wagner, were saved from the 1943 conflagration, and are thus of some historical value. Showing praiseworthy Anglophilic



tendencies, in view of the nationality of the architects of the museum's downfall back in 1943, the collection today boasts effigies of the Queen, Princess Diana, Robbie Williams and all four Beatles.

There is no longer any chamber of horrors, just a few misshapen figures of torture victims, kept behind a sheet in the basement. Nor are any live freaks exhibited on the

premises, although there are effigies of Michael Jackson, Mariedl the Giantess, the non-existent monster Edward Mordake, the equally chimaeric American fat man Baster Simkus, the double-nosed American Bill Durks, and a German known as the 'Human Rhinoceros' for his prodigious nasal ornament. When next in Hamburg, you should go and see them all.



There is an exhibition pamphlet entitled *Panoptikum, das Wachsfigurenkabinett* and a book by K Gille, *Panoptikum: 125 Jahre zwischen Wachs und Wirklichkeit* (Hamburg, 2004). On other German waxworks museums, see S Oettermann in *Viel Vergnügen* (Essen, 1992), pp36-63; on the lost Edinburgh wax museums see J Bondeson (*Edinburgh Life* May/June 2018, pp20-22); on French and Scandinavian waxworks museums see VR Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities* (Berkeley, 1999) and MB Sandberg, *Living Pictures, Missing Persons* (Princeton, 2003).

♦ JAN BONDESON is a senior lecturer at Cardiff University, and a regular contributor to FT. His latest book is *The Lion Boy and Other Medical Curiosities*.

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WHY FORTEAN?



FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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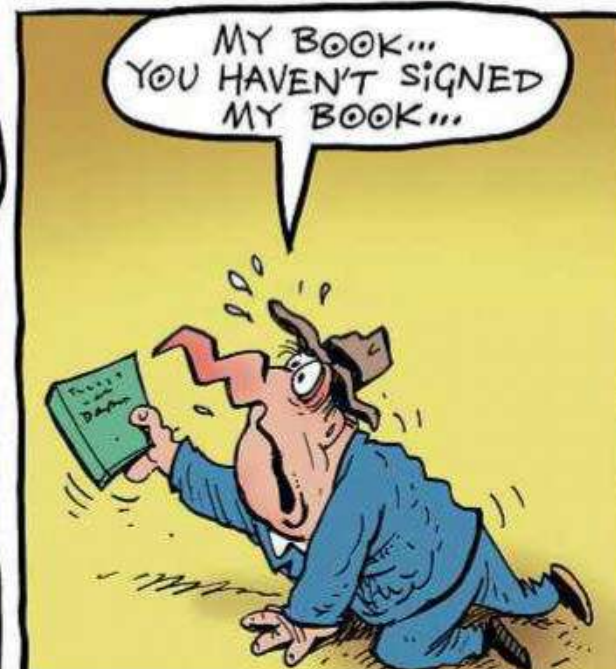
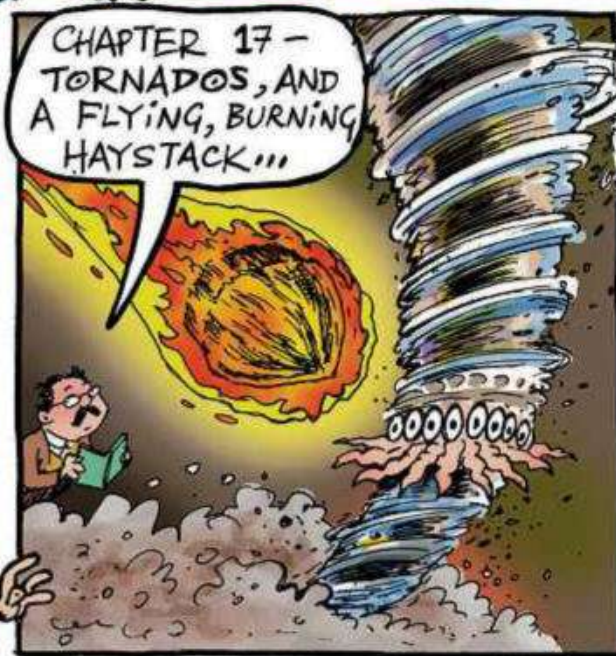
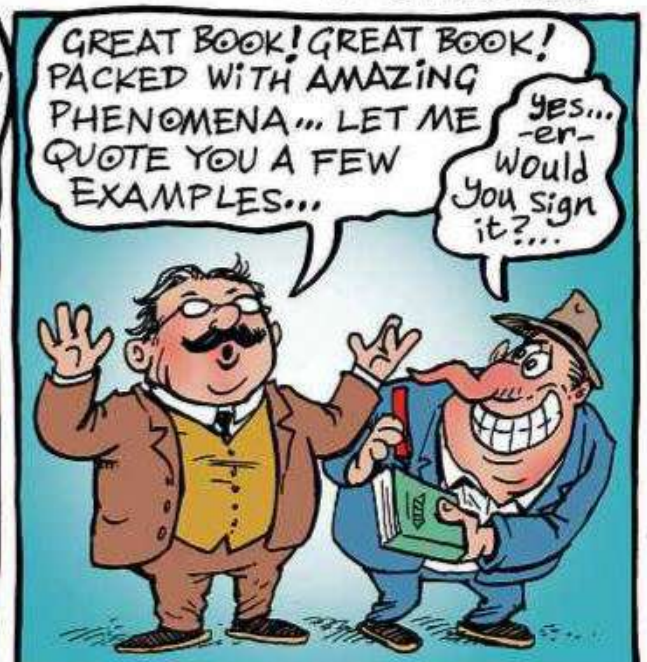
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ON SALE 5 DEC 2019

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A body found wedged in an 18in (46cm) gap behind a supermarket freezer has been identified as that of a man who worked at the same store and went missing a decade ago. DNA analysis showed the remains found at the No Frills Supermarket in Council Bluffs, Iowa, belong to Larry Ely Murillo-Moncada, 25. He had been reported missing on 28 November 2009 after walking out of his parents' home barefoot during a snowstorm following an argument. His parents said he had been acting irrationally around the time he went missing, possibly caused by medication he was taking. An autopsy found no signs of trauma, and the case has been deemed an accidental death. Former employees said that workers often climbed into the space on top of the coolers, which was used for storage, sometimes to hide when they wanted to take an unofficial break. Noise from the coolers' compressors may have drowned out any attempts by Murillo-Moncada to call for help. Shoppers had been complaining of a "terrible smell" for years. The supermarket had been closed for three years by the time contractors removing shelving and freezer units from the store discovered the remains last January. [CNN] 22 July; independent.co.uk, 23 July; Sky News, Metro, 24 July 2019.

A reclusive man who had been missing for months was eaten, bones and all, by his pack of dogs. DNA testing determined that pieces of bone recovered from the dogs' faeces were those of Freddie Mack, 57. The 18 mixed-breed dogs apparently devoured all of Mack's body, clothing and hair, in his house near Venus, Texas, leaving nothing larger than 2in to 5in (5-13cm) bone fragments. "Never have we ever, or anyone we've spoken to, heard of an entire human being consumed," Deputy Aaron Pitts told the Associated Press. "The bones were completely broken up and eaten." Mack had serious health problems, and it was unclear whether the dogs killed their owner or consumed his body after he died from a medical condition. Two of the dogs were killed by their mates, 13 were put down because of their "aggressive nature" and three were put up for adoption. Deputy Pitts said that Mack had kept his dogs well fed and cared for. Mack's family had not heard from him since mid-April, and the aggressive dogs prevented them from entering his house. [AP] 10 July; D.Telegraph, 12 July 2019.



"A 39-year-old woman was found dead on her living room floor by her neighbours. Her hands were covered in scratches and her pet cat was found disembowelled in the kitchen with its tail hacked off. On autopsy her stomach was found to be full of cat intestines, adipose tissue, and strips of fur-covered skin. An intact left kidney and adipose tissue were found lodged in her throat just above her epiglottis. After a complete investigation, the cause of death was determined to be asphyxia by smothering due to animal tissue." (Margaret Redpath MD: 'An unusual case of smothering secondary to ingesting raw pet cat', *American Journal of Forensic Medicine & Pathology*, June 2011.)

A Daesh jihadist blew himself up when the drone bomb he was operating ran low on battery, flew back to him, and detonated over his head. The man had launched the device aiming to detonate the plastic explosives on it near troops in Mosul, northern Iraq. However, the drone was not fully charged and when it started to run out of power it 'boomeranged' back to its starting point. Drones are programmed to do so, so that owners do not lose them. *Sun*, 26 Aug 2019.

September 10 was the Shiite holy day of Ashura, commemorating the death of the Prophet Mohammad's grandson. A packed procession of black-clad pilgrims made their way to his gold-domed shrine in the Iraqi city of Karbala, about 60 miles (100km) south of Baghdad. As the massive crowd pressed forward, a stampede broke out that left at least 31 people dead and another 100 injured. *D.Telegraph*, 11 Sept 2019.

Pasquale Persia, 14, was crushed to death in Monterotondo, Italy, when his father fell on him from a roof during a storm on 23 February. Gabrielle Persia, 55, plunged 18ft (5.5m) while trying to fix damage to his wood business from gale-force winds. And in July a woman died when she fell from a ninth-floor balcony while having sex with her partner – who survived after he landed on top of her. The couple were at a party in a tower block in St Petersburg, Russia. The woman, who was naked from the waist down, hit the ground first and died instantly. Her body cushioned the fall of her naked partner, who sustained only minor bruising. He was seen to stagger back inside the building. *Sun*, 25 Feb; *Metro*, 18 July 2019.

Cosy Crime Pays For Indy Author

Lynn Florkiewicz's dream of being a writer began when she was just six years old, but it had to sit on the back-burner until, at the age of 45, she took a creative writing course with The Writers Bureau, and started out on a whole new adventure...



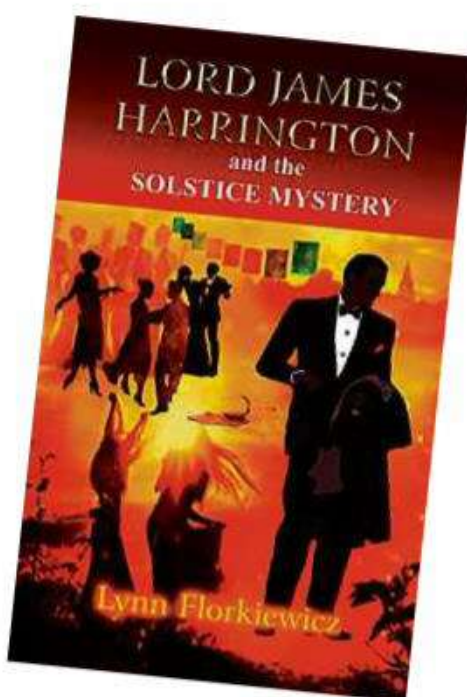
Lynn Florkiewicz

Avid reading as a child laid the foundation for Lynn's love of mystery and crime stories, and she always imagined that one day she'd write her own. When she grew up though, marriage and a promising career as a singer/songwriter on the British and American folk circuits gave her little time to pursue writing until, after a bout of particularly debilitating illness, she decided it was time to bring it to the fore.

Lynn enrolled on The Writers Bureau's Creative Writing Course back in 2001. She worked steadily through its 20 tutor-marked assignments, earning her course fees back from published work and getting placed/highly commended in several writing competitions along the way. Confidence thoroughly boosted, she then decided to try writing a children's adventure story - *The Quest for the Crystal Skulls*, of which, BBC Springwatch's Michaela Strachen said: 'There are many ways to create awareness about what we're doing to planet Earth, I found this an incredibly powerful and compelling one. I read it in one go.' (*The Quest for the Crystal Skulls* is available from Amazon and Penpress Partnership Book Publishing).

Inspired by a long-time love of cosy crime (Agatha Christie, Carola Dunn etc), Lynn's next move was to follow her

childhood dream and create her own murder-mystery series. And so it was that Lord James Harrington, country landowner, ex-racing driver and amateur sleuth, was born. When her first whodunit, *The Winter Mystery*, was launched on Kindle it received a plethora of five-star reviews from cosy crime fans, and that was all the encouragement Lynn needed to write more.



Five years on, and Lord James Harrington is a well-established character with his name on nine book covers. Lynn is already in the process of writing a tenth, with plans to release a new mystery every year. The books are all available from Amazon in Kindle, print and audio format, as well

as from Lord Harrington's very own website: www.lordjamesharrington.com.

'I've created a world that I adore and I love to slip into that imaginary community and meet up with my characters,' says Lynn. 'I am not a literary writer. I'm not here to change the world or make you think, I want to entertain people and, from the feedback I've received, I tick that box.'

Recently, Lord James Harrington was picked-up by Magna Publishing (part of Ulverscroft). They intend to release the whole series in audio and large print formats, and already, the American Audio File Magazine has awarded the first of these recordings with an Earphone Audio Award.

Lynn is just one of many Writers Bureau students who have found their way to publishing success. So if you harbour a dream to write, they can help. Their courses provide students with a professional writer as a personal tutor and cover all types of writing, as well as teaching the business side of being an author. To request free details, contact The Writers Bureau at: www.writersbureau.com or call – 0800 856 2008. Quote ATT19

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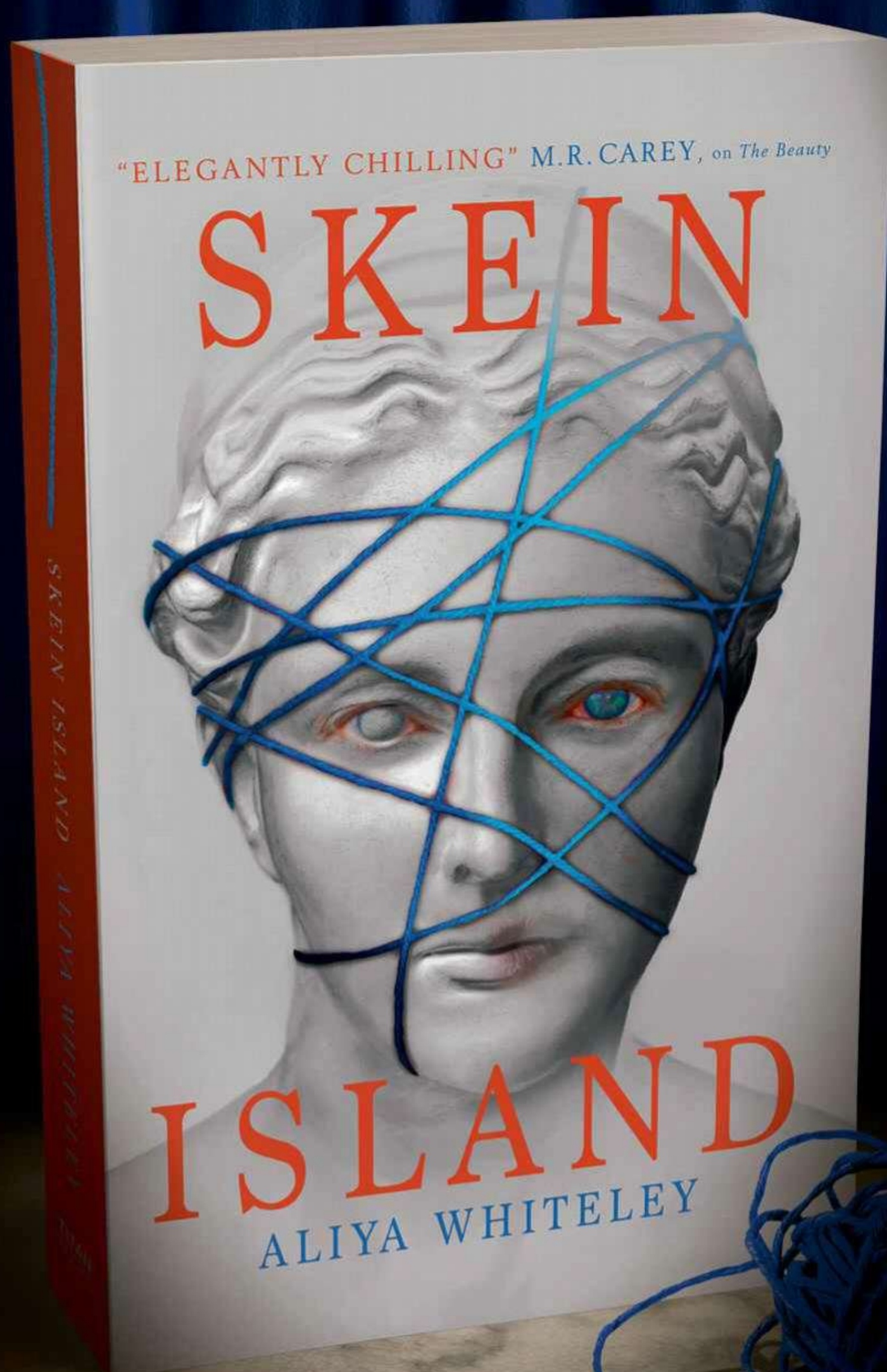
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


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